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SAXON TOWER OF EARL'S BARTON CHURCH.

See page 377.

AN
ENGLISH HOLIDAY

WITH
CAR AND CAMERA

BY
JAMES JOHN HISSEY

AUTHOR OF
'UNTRAVELLED ENGLAND,' 'ON THE BOX SEAT,'
'AN OLD-FASHIONED JOURNEY,' 'OVER FEN AND WOLD,' ETC.

WITH TWENTY-EIGHT FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS AND A
MAP OF THE ROUTE

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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TO MY COUSIN

THE REV. JOHN ARCHIBALD SORBY, M.A.

FOR "AULD LANG SYNE"

PREFACE

THE reasons why people travel are many and various; some travel for their health, a few bold spirits set forth in search of adventure in little-explored lands; others roam therein after big game, still others wander far afield simply because they are naturally restless, and find their only rest in movement. Sundry unenterprising folk travel merely because their friends do; others go abroad, perchance, to escape from domestic worries or to find distraction from business cares. Stevenson has it that "we travel to find friends, and he is a fortunate voyager who finds many." For myself I frankly confess that I travel for none of these things, but purely for pleasure, and, like the famous Dr. Syntax, "in search of the picturesque," added to which is the joy and the health of a life in the open air. Nor when I go on a pleasure jaunt do I desire much company—one sympathetic companion is all I crave; more may prove disturbing to a contemplative mind; two may readily be catered for at country inns; with a party the accommodation

is less sure—and what better companion can a man have than his wife?

Rural England is only a half-explored country; the guide-book compilers have merely skimmed it, in fact they chiefly concern themselves with well-known spots that are written about endlessly. Some of the most interesting and picturesque places we came to they do not mention at all (at least those guide-books I consulted, after the journey was done, solely to see if they did mention them); to give one instance, of many, there is the historic and quaint old moated manor-house of Cote in Oxfordshire, that closed its gates against Charles I. and wherein Oliver Cromwell once slept. Other places of much beauty and interest we came across they briefly dismiss in a line, or at most in two; to them they are but names!

Rural England is not to be thoroughly explored in a man's life-time; hardly, perhaps, a single county would reveal all its treasures to the most zealous searcher in that period. For years now past have I taken long summer journeys in some portion of our own homeland, and on each journey do I find new delights and make fresh discoveries, of which this volume gives many a sample. The photographs reproduced therein are but a tithe of those I took on the tour, for the picturesque material was everywhere abundant: the difficulty

has been to make a selection from the multitude of subjects secured.

My photographs, though they lack the charm of pencil drawings, have the virtue of being accurate representations of scenes and places we visited, and I trust may serve to show how much of interest and beauty there is to be found in rural England. The lens, it must be remembered, will only produce a picture if a picture is before it ; unlike an artist, it has not the power to romance, invent, or alter things, so as to add to their picturesqueness. There is no poetry about a lens ; it simply records facts !

The car in which we took our journey was one of moderate horse-power and moderate in price ; moreover, it was comfortably seated, and provided a sufficiency of room for a reasonable amount of luggage : it was quiet-running, and had ample power to mount any hill, however steep ; the engines gave us no trouble of any kind from start to finish—and what more could even a millionaire desire, or obtain ? unless it were excessive speed, which we did not wish for or require.

For the rest I must refer my readers to the following pages.

J. J. HISSEY.

TREVIN TOWERS,
EASTBOURNE.

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AN ENGLISH HOLIDAY

CHAPTER I

Our summer holiday—Where shall we go?—An open programme—
Along the south coast—Towns old and new—An ancient sea-
port—A history in stone—A narrow escape—An incident of
old-time travel—The work of the craftsman.

ONE still warm August evening found my wife and self enjoying the fragrance and comparative coolness of the outside air, comfortably seated in the old stone-built summer-house that stands at the end of the tiled garden terrace; from thence we looked down over a yew-enclosed lawn with its moss-encrusted sun-dial, and beyond, through pillared pines, we caught a glimpse, on the high horizon, of the distant sea shimmering in the moonlight. Overhead the stars were shining softly down from a calm, cloudless sky, and upward, borne across the stillness, we heard, or fancied that we heard, the slumberous wash, wash, wash of the summer waves lapping lazily on the shingly shore,—and there we sat, my wife and I, in silent enjoyment of the restful quietude.

At last we had experienced an almost perfect day whose end was peace. For the past fortnight, and for longer, it had done little else but rain.

For weeks the clouds had raked the hills,
And vexed the vales with raining ;
And all the woods were wet with mist,
And all the brooks complaining.

I had sat for some time drowsily smoking a post-prandial pipe in perfect contentment, letting my thoughts drift as they do in dreams, when I was awakened from my reverie by my wife exclaiming, "I wonder if you are thinking about our projected holiday? Now is the time for touring, before the evenings draw farther in ; and after so much bad weather surely a spell of fine days should follow. Moreover, the barometer is rising ; let us pack the motor car to-morrow and be off somewhere ; home is delightful, but housekeeping becomes monotonous in time and a trifle wearisome."

Then I suddenly remembered that the year was growing old, and that for various reasons our usual annual holiday on the road had been delayed. Though why that tranquil evening should specially have suggested a roving expedition to the better half of "we" I cannot say ; unless, perchance, it were the sight and sound of the distant sea, and mental visions of possible ships voyaging thereon spurred her imagination and aroused thoughts of wandering ; such wandering taking the shape of a cruise on land as being the nearest thing to a sea voyage and its freedom we could command. Not

that an ocean voyage appealed to us, for the modern mail steamer has robbed the sea of much of its mystery, of most of its poetry, and nearly all of its terror; it has become a mere floating hotel, or even palace, wherein one suffers from too much company and too much luxury. Now to tour without roughing it, be it in ever so mild a manner, to be taken instead of taking oneself, is to lose the zest, the personal interest, the excitement, and true intent of travel; for is not that very word derived from "travail"? But this is a matter apart. We were minded to journey on land, and by car, taking our own time and suiting our own convenience. Unless you be master of your conveyance you are simply conveyed from one spot to another much as a parcel is,—with more dignity truly, still you are just carried!

The true charm of travel, to my mind at least, is to be able to dictate the direction, to have it in one's power to stop or to go on, to loiter or to hasten, as the mood of the moment inclines. So on a driving or a motor tour the element of individuality comes to the fore; the man who travels thus asserts his freedom, and can enjoy to the full the charm of independence,—subject to the possible but slight risk of a breakdown of horse or car,—and such is the essence of a true holiday. Time-tables trouble him not, for he is master of his own time; he needs no cab to take him to the station; he has no trains to catch, or miss, or wait for; no tickets to purchase; no luggage to look after or worry about, for that goes with him, either in carriage or in car,

and is ever at command—so the friction of travel is reduced to a minimum.

When, some years ago, I ventured on my first motor tour—motors not then being so perfect as they now are—I was warned that I was tempting Providence overmuch, and that the least evil I could expect was to break down “miles from anywhere” and leave my car behind, lucky if I escaped without personal hurt. However, on that first and experimental journey of five hundred miles, taken with my wife alone and without a man to help in case of need, the car gave practically no trouble. A few stoppages we had, owing to my inexperience, but I soon discovered the causes and set matters right, having taken the simple precaution before starting of becoming acquainted with the working, the treatment, and the driving of my car. From that expedition I returned home delighted with the novelty of motor travelling; but what impressed me most was, that as I was driving a machine that never tired, I had only myself to consider. I could extend my day’s stage at my own pleasure. When driving horses I have often been compulsorily anchored at an inn for the night when both a lovely evening and my quarters inclined me to proceed, but fatigued horses forbade me following my inclinations. Moreover, a car will not shy; it will not bolt if you leave it unattended when calling a halt by the roadside, and a shed will serve it well enough for a night’s shelter if you are pressed for accommodation. The motor car has restored to us our heritage of the road. The old coaching inns, too, are waking up

after their long sleep and neglect, and are preparing, with more or less success, to welcome the modern-day wayfarer in the good old-fashioned manner. When, after the coming of the railway, the roads became almost deserted, and the fine country-side hostelries, with their century-gathered traditions, forsaken and forgotten, who would have thought that the whirligig of time would bring forth their resurrection? Now it only remains for the country landlords of to-day to improve their accommodation, and to rediscover the art of good cooking, to be as prosperous as their forefathers. The modern road-traveller does not so much desire luxury as comfort and cleanliness.

But I have wandered a good deal from my opening scene. When the curtain rose my wife and self were discovered seated in our summer-house, and a gentle hint was thrown out to me that we had not yet taken our usual summer holiday, and that as we possessed a motor car we might as well make use of it, and start forth a-touring therein. That we both needed a change was manifest, for of late I had felt, and had even dared to complain, that the children had become noisier and more rampageous than ever; on the other hand, my wife declared that housekeeping was a burden, and the management of tradespeople and servants simply a drudgery. So to divert our thoughts we got a-chatting about the delights of travel; pleasant memories of past journeys were brought to mind, till the call of the country, with the visions of green trees, green fields, and fair landscapes it conjured

up, came to us and would not be denied,—a call that comes surely, sooner or later, to those who live by the sea as well as to those who dwell in towns. So, as we chatted on, the wander fever took possession of us,

And all our fancies fled away
Upon an English holiday.

To-morrow we would pack the car with our needful baggage, not forgetting maps, a supply of rugs, waterproofs, and such luxuries as sketch-books, camera, and a luncheon-basket, the last enabling us to be entirely independent of hotels during the day, the only compulsory thing being to find quarters for the night. We had no seas to cross—the road from our own door would take us into Arcadia! The sole difficulty that suggested itself to me was to find fresh roads to traverse and taverns new wherein to take our ease, for we had already explored a goodly portion of our own country, and had even jokingly remarked that, at some not distant date, it would be needful to have England enlarged in order to provide us with new ground to travel over!

“Where shall we go?” my wife asked of me across the breakfast-table the next morning. “Wherever you like,” I replied. “Personally, I’ve no particular destination in view, neither am I in any hurry to arrive at that delightfully indefinite locality. We’ve all England before us; let us take the fortune of the road, just driving in the direction where the country looks the most inviting. It is not a bad idea to have no plan, it leaves us so

absolutely untrammelled; we're bound to arrive somewhere by the evening." So the matter would probably have rested had it not been that, glancing at the newspaper, my eye chanced upon the following paragraph:—"A project is on foot for the purchase by public subscription, and the preservation, of the cottage at Nether Stowey (a remote village at the foot of the Quantocks) which was the home of Samuel Taylor Coleridge a hundred years ago, where he wrote his most famous poems, including 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel.'" The reading of that paragraph settled the detail as to where first to make for. To us the land of the Quantocks was a *terra incognita*; thither would we go. When we arrived there it would be time enough to discuss our further route. For the moment that hastily arranged programme sufficed.

Then a map of England was consulted as to the best line of country to take for Nether Stowey, so as to avoid as far as possible traversing familiar ground. Finally it was decided to drive from our home at Eastbourne along the south coast as far as Southampton, then to cross the New Forest to Ringwood, next to make for Wimborne Minster, from there to follow up the valley of the Dorset Stour (for a river valley suggests pleasant wandering), and from some point farther on to strike westward to the Quantocks. Unfortunately, as far as Wimborne, we should have to journey over thrice-travelled roads, but beyond Wimborne we should be in a country having, for us, the glamour of the unknown.

It has been said that motorists rush through the country seeing nothing, eager only to conquer distances ; that they need a continent to travel in to satisfy their speed-craze and space-hunger ; but the fault lies in the man, not in the car ; moreover, there be motorists and motorists. It is not necessary because you elect to travel by car to emulate the rush of the railway ; you can meander about in a car in as leisurely a fashion as though you were driving a horse. Ours was intended to be a leisurely tour ; we meant to see and enjoy the country we passed through, not to obtain fleeting and soon-forgotten visions of it ; otherwise, except for the fresh air, express trains would have conveyed us from place to place as well. Still, preaching and practising are not always the same thing ; and after all this saying I am bound to confess that we took advantage of the powers of the motor to make moderate haste over our first long stage to Wimborne, so as to get into a fresh country without needless delay ; but it was not so much by mere speed that we covered the stretch of well-known ground at the start as by an uninterrupted progress. For a space we sped along, content to take a broad view of scenery, without slowing down or calling a halt to renew our acquaintance with the familiar ; later on we would loiter to our hearts' content—and we did !

After all, we never started on our wanderings on the appointed day ; for one thing and another unexpectedly delayed us till the late afternoon, when it was mutually agreed that we would put off our

departure till the next morning. But as a salve to our consciences for the loss of time it was stipulated that we would rise, and without fail, with the sun, take a hasty breakfast, and be off. The morrow actually found us up "betimes," as Mr. Pepys has it, whilst indeed both sea and sky were dull and grey and longing for the dawn; and before the day was much over an hour old we had mounted the car and were on our way.

It was a delightful experience driving forth in the first freshness and fragrance of the early morning, when the roads were free from traffic, children, idlers, dogs, and fowls. We were soon in the country and gliding swiftly and smoothly through a world stilled in sleep. Wilmington's ruined Priory was passed on our left, with its prehistoric "Old Man" cut out of the sloping down-side above—a strange figure that has puzzled many a learned antiquary as to its origin. Then presently a dip in the road revealed ahead a wide, green level land stretching far away from the foot of the Downs till lost in an infinity of blue, where the far-off horizon line seemed to melt into the sky. A wide green world fading away into nothingness, a prospect that brought with it a sense of solitude and spaciousness. What scenic possibilities might not lie in that blue beyond whither we were tending? Our eyes rejoiced in their unaccustomed liberty of range, whilst our poetic imaginings were unrestrained. It is well to see broadly at times, it helps one to think so; whilst now and then to indulge one's fancy is to lift oneself out of the rut of the commonplace. Why should

always the painter, the poet, or the novelist do our romancing for us ?

Looking backward, nestled in a wooded hollow of the Downs and but a short distance away, we caught a glimpse of the retired village of Alfriston, a spot well worth a visit for its fine old flint-built church, each flint being painstakingly squared. *Ad majorem Dei Gloriam* justly might those ancient monks have inscribed upon the sacred edifice they constructed with so much loving labour. Close beside this church still stands a rare specimen of a pre-Reformation priest-house (a lowly dwelling) ; and the village street is graced by a quaint and ancient pilgrims' inn with curious carvings on its front. How old that hostelry is I should not care to guess—nearly, if not quite, four centuries I am told.

Presently the compact, clean, and homely little town of Lewes came in view, dominated by its grey old castle, now time-rent, worn, and no longer defiant. At the foot of the hill up which the red-roofed town climbs, and at the same time clusters round its crumbling feudal stronghold, we had a vision of the toy river Ouse brightening the landscape by its silvery gleaming as it took its winding way through the level and luxuriant meadows southward to the sea. Dotted on the summits of the downs around were several white, old-fashioned windmills spreading their whirling sails to the brisk breeze, thus giving a feeling of movement and life to the peaceful prospect. Then it struck us that the miller, if he has corn to grind, must, to earn his

living, oftentimes be an early riser, so as to take advantage of the wind which blows when it will, and not to suit any one's convenience. Now steam in harness, being man's servant, is ousting wind as a driving power, and the eye-pleasing old windmill, the only building that gives the charm of movement to the country-side, is gradually disappearing, though in Sussex and some portions of the eastern counties many happily remain to us. As one drives about England one can hardly fail to notice, now and then, a windmill falling to decay. Who ever saw a windmill in course of erection? At some distant day it may be that the only place to find this once familiar feature in the English landscape will be in a prized painting or a faded photograph. I know not quite why it should be, but progress always seems inimical to the picturesque. Now, from the eye-pleasing and artists'-loved windmill to the prosaic, not to say ugly steam-mill, is a sad retrogression!

Lewes, as we passed through, looked like a town forgotten and forsaken, for its ancient High Street was deserted, not even a stray dog was to be seen; we had arrived too soon, the actors had not yet appeared on the scene. Facing the High Street the curious round tower of St. Michael's Church attracted our attention, for round church towers are not met with every day, unless one be travelling in Norfolk or Suffolk, where they are fairly plentiful. It was a novel sensation to us this wandering through an unawakened world. "Never," says Ruskin, "if you can help it, miss seeing the dawn and the sunset; and never, if you can help it, see anything

but dreams between." So having viewed the dawn for the nonce, we felt like one who had done a virtuous deed, and determined till the sunset, as far as possible, to live up to the master's ideal, to make our drive a sort of prolonged daydream, to look upon the country as a never-ending picture-gallery, to search out the poetry and romance of the way-side, disregarding all else. For there is an art in not seeing what one does not desire to see; besides, it saves the eyesight much unnecessary fatigue.

From sleepy, old-world Lewes to intensely modern Brighton was an easy run of some eight miles along a broad, smooth highway. In a short time we had been transposed from the picturesque past to the prosaic present; it was as though we had driven out of one century into another! We were not sorry to escape from fashionable Brighton with its long-drawn-out rows of huge hotels, stately houses, fine shops, and carefully paraded sea-front, the former so monotonously uninteresting, the latter so painfully precise, the seaside tamed and vulgarised. "How is it," asks a writer in an old and odd number of that quaint magazine *The Quest* that I picked up at a second-hand bookshop on the way,— "how is it that ancient towns and villages are delightful and full of beauty, and that modern towns are on the whole ugly and uninteresting? . . . And when I speak of modern towns as ugly, I do not mean that many modern towns do not possess one or more modern buildings which, within certain limits, are beautiful and interesting, but that on the whole modern towns are failures from the point of

view of architectural interest and beauty." Well, apart from the fact that old houses have made their history whilst modern ones have their history to make, to me there seems to be a subtle charm in ancientness that defies precise definition. Truly, sentiment has much to do with it, but not all; there is something deeper still.

The road from Brighton to Shoreham has been termed the ugliest bit of highway in England. Certainly it is not lovely; it is neither town nor country, but a succession of houses, mostly mean, with stretches of waste land between. Yet it is not a wholly uninteresting length of road, at least where it follows alongside of the extended inlet of sheltered water that forms Shoreham harbour; for there you catch a sight of shipping and of tall masts and the glance of tide; there you may see the shapely, clean-looking, timber-laden ship from Norway unloading, the grimy collier, the fussy tug, the ocean tramp steamer, the fishing-smack with its tanned sails and tanglement of netting hanging out to dry; perchance, also, a coasting paddle pleasure-boat, prim and smartly painted, and one or two spruce yachts that look extra spick-and-span in such a mixed company. All these we saw in passing, and saw with pleasure. The life of a minor port is always suggestive and interesting, and never lacks some element of the picturesque.

Except for the fussy tugs Shoreham harbour had a lazy look, as though nothing hurried there. The sailors ashore, quietly smoking and chatting, seemed to lead a delightfully dreamy existence, and amongst

them one might perchance find his ideal of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, as indeed we did. Then there is the mingled smell of tar and salt water, odours that always conjure up to my mind the romance of the sea and visions of adventure. The old-fashioned wooden ships are infinitely more picturesque than the stately liners, and suggest more than they the danger and the poetry of the sea. The sight of a seaport, with the weather-beaten vessels therein, appeals to the imagination, as it brings it in touch with the farthestmost parts of the world. The ship you see leaving the harbour may be voyaging to the golden cities of far Cathay, or be bound in search of new El Dorados in the West, to say nothing of treasure-hunting expeditions! A little indulgence in poetic fancy can do no harm to any soul. There is romance in Shoreham harbour.

Shoreham town—"working, marrying, breeding Shoreham Town"—is not beautiful as a whole, but, like the curate's egg, it is good, or rather picturesque in parts, and an artist might with small search secure many a gem out of it. But the glory of Shoreham is its ancient Norman church, one of the earliest and noblest of the many noble churches the conquering Normans built; and here, as elsewhere, they left behind them a history in stone. They built seriously as well as sturdily, those ancient warriors; first a castle to show their strength, then a church to proclaim their piety. Thus they combined robbery with religion, and so, according to their lights, made the best of both worlds.

The great square tower of Shoreham church, rising in rugged simplicity and castle-like above the town, is impressive in its massiveness and its hoary antiquity. Its stones are time-stained and greyed by exposure to the winter storms and summer suns of centuries ; some are crumbling and eaten in places by the action of the salt sea-winds and the frosts of forgotten years. Still there stands the tower, strong and substantial, and showing no signs of weakness. The sculpturing of the sea-winds has but added to its long story and to its beauty without diminishing its real strength ; for the ancient craftsman employed such a superabundance of material as to allow an ample margin of security against all contingencies and stress of storms and weatherings. It was this church that inspired Swinburne in his fine poem "On the South Coast," and thus he sings of it—

Strong as time, and as faith sublime . . .

Stands the shrine that has seen decline eight hundred waxing and
waning years.

Tower set square to the storms of air and change of season that
glooms and glows,

Wall and roof of it tempest proof, and equal ever to suns and snows.

Aisle and nave that the whelming wave of time has whelmed not or
touched or neared,

Arch and vault without stain or fault, by hands of craftsmen we know
not reared.

What changes and what history has not that old tower witnessed, down to the time when, and even since, Charles II. made good his escape from Shoreham's ancient port to Fécamp in Normandy!

It was at Shoreham, too, that John landed after the death of Richard I., and many other eventful happenings have taken place in and about the storied old town. Prince Charles, by the way, was nearly captured on his ride thither. At Charmouth, it may be remembered, his horse cast a shoe, and Hamnet the local smith, who was called upon to replace it, remarked, "Only three shoes, and all set in different counties, and one in Worcester." The fact aroused his suspicions, which he gave voice to. Captain Massey lent his ears to the story, sounded "To boot and saddle," and the pursuit began in right earnest. But Prince Charles had a good start, and with his companions turned down a by-lane beyond Bridport unnoticed, and so in due course found Shoreham and safety. A curious circumstance about this bit of ancient history is that, in those days, a local smith should have been able to tell that a horse had been shod in different counties, and have even been able to name them. To compare road travelling of to-day with that of the seventeenth century, fancy the mechanic of a garage being able to say in what county or counties a motorist's tyres had been replaced!

From Shoreham we turned inland a short way and crossed the tawny-coloured, slowly-flowing river Adur by a creaky and ancient wooden bridge. There was a time when this bridge boasted of being the longest in England, and even to-day it claims to be the longest wooden bridge therein. A primitive and picturesque structure it is, with its

timber piers below and the crooked railings at its sides, mostly bent and warped by time and the strains of long usage. A favourite subject with artists is this old bridge; the walls of the Academy bear witness to its popularity both with the painter and the public.

A little lower down the stream may be seen a more modern suspension bridge, but though the lines of this are not ungraceful, somehow it does not appeal to the eye as does the bent and broken structure above. Probably it is because the former is the work of the engineer and the latter of the craftsman. Now, the engineer's work must needs be formal, whilst that of the craftsman, making the best use of his material, taking advantage of the strength of the natural twists of his timber, and the best spots for the foundations of his piers, happily escapes formality; so his bridge abounds in pleasant and varied curves, is full of character and interest, and therefore charms the eye, which it leads gradually from bank to bank, not by one sudden span. Moreover, it harmonises with the landscape, and seems, indeed, to be a part and parcel of it; it is not out of scale with its surroundings, nor does it unduly assert itself above other buildings around, and it is agreeable in tone and colour. Take the suspension bridge away, and the prospect would gain rather than lose by its absence; remove the wooden one, and you rob the scene of a picturesque feature that it could ill spare. The suspension bridge suggests that it was designed elsewhere and just put up there; it might as well be put up in any

other place. Not so the wooden one ; that, you feel, was built and thought out on the spot, that it grew according to circumstances ; it is purely a local affair, and would assuredly not do so well, or at all, elsewhere.

CHAPTER II

Smugglers and wreckers—A Saxon church tower—Country sounds—“A cupful of beauty”—A quaint and ancient village—Forest scenery—The art of losing one's way—Country inns—Wood fires—The fisherman's holiday—Corfe Mullen—The soul of scenery.

LEAVING the ancient bridge, about which white-winged gulls were whirling restlessly, we came, a little farther on, to the Sussex Pad—a homely little inn of modern build. Unfortunately the old historic house of the same title that formerly stood there was burnt down a few years back; rumour says it was a favourite resort of smugglers and wreckers. Of the latter Congreve wrote—

Sussex men that dwell upon the shore
Look out when storms arise and billows roar;
Devoutly praying with uplifted hands
That some well-laden ship may strike the sands,
To whose rich cargo they may make pretence.

Lifeboats and lifeboat stations were unknown at the period, undesired; indeed, these barbarians had a cruel saying—

Save a stranger from the sea,
And he'll turn your enemy.

Possibly the Sussex men were no worse than others round about the coast, for these rough times bred rough men. Indeed, there is a story told of a certain west-country church clerk who one day exclaimed to his parson, "I cannot understand how it is, whilst there be prayers in the Prayer-Book for peace, for fine weather, for rain, for good harvests, and thanksgivings for them, why there be no prayers for wrecks and thanksgivings for one when we do get it!"

Nothing now is old about the Sussex Pad except its title—a title that recalls the primitive, picturesque, and adventurous days of old, when this, as well as many other byroads, were practically impassable for wheel traffic, so that men had perforce to travel by "pad-horse" with their packs slung on beside them. At some remote country inns may still be found a building standing apart and known as the pack-house, wherein past-time travellers placed their packs. I have come upon such buildings in out-of-the-way spots; to-day, of course, they are put to other uses, but their ancient names cling to them and reveal their original purpose. The tenacity with which country folk retain the old names of things and places is remarkable. As an instance, I know a certain wayside house that a century or more ago was an inn entitled the White Hart; the house is now, and has been ever since its days as an hostelry were ended, a pleasant farmstead; yet, in spite of all endeavours to change the name, it is still locally called by the curiously inappropriate appellation of the White Hart. It was this strange name for a

farmhouse that caused me to make inquiries and glean the above particulars.

Writing of the Sussex Pad, and remembering the delightful stretch of downs behind it, brings to mind the lines of William Morris, wherein he bids the Londoner

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston-stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town ;
Think rather of the pack-horse and the down.

A pleasant singer is Morris, a "dreamer of dreams," as he confesses himself to be ; still it is good for the jaded mind to dream at times and to forget the commonplace, for only in dreams can one find one's ideals. On the Sussex downs one may come upon oxen ploughing the land with heavy, primitive wooden ploughs as they did in the Saxon days, and lying secluded and remote therein one may discover old-world hamlets, and good-natured, unsophisticated country folk to chat with. A land where ancientness reigns, and the modern world may be put out of mind as though it were not. A land where the sun delights to shine, where men lead a simple life, and all the hours seem golden !

Our road now became narrow and winding, roughly following, at a little way inland, the curving line of the coast. Presently we came to the small and sleepy village of Sompting, noteworthy on account of its ancient and partially Saxon church possessing an uncommon tower ; each of the four sides of this ends in a gable, and from these gables

risers a quadrangular steeple—a tower of its kind, I believe, unique in England, unless a meaningless modern copy of it I once saw in Hampshire destroys its uniqueness.

After Sompting we came into a pleasant land of shady woods and verdant pastures, with here and there an old flint-walled and red-roofed farmstead to break any possible monotony of good things, and here and there a cosy cottage built in the same simple, old-fashioned manner of local materials that came nearest to hand. The blue-grey of the walls contrasted effectively with the ruddy-toned roofs, and pigeons hovering over the farmsteads, or fluttering about their red tiles, gave a touch of life and an added sense of homeliness to the ancient and time-mellowed dwellings. How peaceful all the country looked! how suggestive of long and contented abiding! I think there is no other country in the world that bestows upon the leisurely traveller such a real feeling of restfulness as rural England, at least those portions of it whose century-gathered beauty has not been disturbed by the hand of the modern builder, or that even greater sinner, the engineer. To the extent that a man can be made happy by beautiful and reposeful surroundings, the wayfarer in our English Arcadia should be happy—a true Arcadia that ever greets one with a smile! In a restless age it is a land at rest.

Then as the country opened out we passed through cornfields ripening for the harvest—cornfields that waved around us like a golden sea as



AN ANCIENT HALF-TIMBER PIGEON-COTE.

they were swayed by the soft south wind ; and from the rippling corn there came to us a gentle sur, sur, sur, surring of the wind amongst the tossing ears, a faint but plainly audible sound, soothing and delightful to listen to, as Nature's minor music always is. Not that Nature is ever in a minor mood ; sometimes she sounds the big drum, as you may realise when listening to the surging of a wintry sea, or the thunderous, far-resounding boom, boom, boom of the great Atlantic waves as, storm-driven, they dash themselves against the granite crags of the rugged Cornish coast. Much has been written of the charms of country scenes, and how they refresh the eye of the town-tired traveller, but though alluded to at times, less has been said about country sounds,—the liquid gurgling of running streams, the splash of falling water, the rustling of the wind amongst the leafy trees, the hum of bees, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the chime of a far-away clock mellowed by distance, the voice of the breeze as it sweeps over mountain and moor, and the weird music it makes as it passes, to say nothing of the joyous songs of innumerable birds who sing to us everywhere,—these there are, and many other country sounds, needless to catalogue in an unromantic way ; sounds that are often heard, yet unheeded, but when heeded are quite as refreshing to the cultivated ear as country sights are to the eye.

As we drove along, thinking of many things, our road dropped suddenly and steeply down to the river Arun, that revealed itself winding like a silver ribbon

through the greenest of meadows below ; across the river on the opposite hill rose the prim little town of Arundel, with its stately castle dominating it from above. The castle looked, perhaps, a trifle too fresh and restored to be perfectly picturesque, not in the least bit stern or warlike as, I think, an ancient castle should look. Beyond the castle were dark woods, and beyond these again the rounded outline of the distant downs completed the picture ; but it was the grand mass of the castle, yellow-hued in the sunshine, and standing out strongly against the dark background, that held our attention ; the little town below seemed but an accidental gathering on the hillside, so that though the feudal days are gone, the scene retains the sentiment of those far-off times. In stone the vast castle of Arundel still lords it over the small bourgeois town below.

Arundel is a pleasant spot, and the scenery around is as charming as many-tinted woods, sloping hills, meandering river, and green meadows can make it. "A cupful of beauty," as the almost-forgotten poet, William Hayley, who lived at Eartham, near by, has it ; a man, by the way, of whom Southey said, "Everything is good about him except his poetry" — still he had an eye for scenery.

Beyond Arundel we drove through more shady woods, with lazy rooks clamouring amongst them ; the "caw, caw, caw" of rooks is perhaps harsh rather than musical, yet from pleasant associations. To me, it is a sound "to rout the brood of cares." Only the cool gurgling of a mountain stream on a

hot summer's day charms me more to listen to. I cannot reason why, but the caw of rooks always calls forth a mental vision of an old English home, a many-gabled building, with high-pitched roofs and clustering chimneys; on the roof a great bell-turret finds a place, the long, low front of the house is broken by stone-mullioned windows of leaden lattice panes and an ample porch that speaks a welcome. Before the house is a terrace of the Haddon Hall type, and in the centre of the courtyard approach stands an old sun-dial. The walls of the old home are ivy-grown, and there is a wide drive to it through an avenue of ancestral elms. I have never beheld the original—it is a dream house, yet so real in a sense that I have actually made a water-colour drawing of it, on seeing which more than one friend has exclaimed, "What a lovely old place! Where is it?" and I cannot answer them. Such is the magic power of sound! A landscape artist, I know, was inspired, when in London on a visit, by the roar of distant traffic to paint a picture of a rushing mountain torrent; it was, perhaps, the best picture he ever painted, and a critic said of it that "the water seems to bound right out of the canvas." Like the kingdom of Heaven the poetry of the world lies within us; it is the mind that creates the poem. So one man may travel across country and find nothing but pictures, whilst another sees nothing but the commonplace. The mere fact profits nothing. How often, even to the most observant, the beauty of a spot has not been realised until an artist has translated it for him!

So driving on we came to Chichester, noting as we passed by its grand and arched market cross richly sculptured by man as well as by the storms of over three centuries, weather-stained also into a quiet harmony of soft tints, so that the combined result is a veritable picture in stone. Then driving under the cool shadow of its grey and solemn-looking cathedral the pleasant old city was left behind, and we were soon again in the sunlit country ; and a flat country it was, flat enough to satisfy the proverbial Dutchman who hated a hill because it obstructed the view. Even our English ancestors, of the pre-railway days, have been accused of liking their wines sweet and their scenery flat ; but times and tastes have changed—now mountains are in vogue and dry wines the fashion.

Over the level marshlands to our left we caught a glimpse of old-world, historic Bosham, one of the quaintest villages in England, standing remote from the outer world on a sheltered salt-water creek, a creek wherein many a sea-worn ship has found its last resting-place. It was at Bosham, according to accepted tradition, that Canute had his wrestle with the waves and rebuked his courtiers, and in its venerable and rugged Saxon church Canute's daughter is said to have been laid to rest, the spot being marked by a raven (Canute's badge) shown on a yellow tile. It was from Bosham also that Harold sailed on his visit to Normandy, an event that is crudely pictured in the famous Bayeux tapestry. Wherever you travel in England you come upon history three volumes deep ! Therein

the storied past greets you on every hand, even if you would you cannot escape it.

It is surprising what a number of interesting and beautiful spots lie just off the main road, and so are readily missed by the casual traveller; Bosham is an example of this. There is a certain country road that I have frequently driven over for years past, but it was only the other day that I discovered, not a quarter of a mile therefrom, hidden in surrounding woods, one of the most picturesque old moated homes imaginable, and I am constantly making similar discoveries.

For a time we drove on through a level land, passing on our way several straggling and uninteresting villages, and every village appeared to possess a superabundance of public-houses. After a time, however, our road began to pluck up a little spirit; it became even hilly, the signs of population diminished, houses eventually disappeared, and we were again alone with Nature. Now and then as we climbed the hills we caught a welcome glimpse of the sea, that "blue end of the world." At last we came to a long descent, where our road suddenly ended at the side of Southampton Water. Here we drove straight on to a big steam ferry-boat that was waiting there, and were quickly ferried over to the opposite shore. There was no trouble in the crossing, and it afforded us a pleasant vision of shipping from a small coasting schooner to a mighty transatlantic liner. Skirting Southampton by the water-side, and driving round its ancient walls, ruined towers, and gateways—a very inter-

esting drive by the way—we made direct for the New Forest.

It was a pleasant change from the familiar fields with their bounding hedge-rows to the wooded wildness of the forest; truly it was not exactly "forest primeval," but with a little call on the imagination it served that purpose; certainly it was extensive enough to cause us to lose our way and our bearings. Somehow we got on a rough and hilly byroad that, like a Devonshire lane, appeared to have no ending; still, we gladly forgave the roughness and the length of the road because of the charming scenery it led us into, so it chanced that we saw a remote part of the forest probably not often visited by strangers.

However, roads, good or bad, generally lead somewhere, so it did not trouble us that we had got off our course; indeed, what mattered it? If we did not arrive at one place we should arrive at another! Of course, with horses this haphazard mode of touring is not to be commended, but with a tireless motor affairs are on a different footing; a few, or even a many, more miles on the day's journey is of small consequence to the happily independent motorist, who, if he has no hard-and-fast programme, need be in no hurry, though, in case of being stranded far from anywhere, it is well to be provided with a luncheon basket, and to see that it is properly provisioned, for motoring across country is hungry work! And I never yet knew a hungry man who could fitly enjoy good scenery or himself.

When travelling simply for pleasure and "in

search of the picturesque," it is a positive advantage to lose oneself at times, and when you fail to do so accidentally it is well to do so on purpose. These wanderings out of the beaten track add both to the interest and to the excitement, however mild, of a driving tour. When all is unknown before you all things seem possible, then you are ever kept in a state of delightful expectancy as to what is coming next, what each succeeding bend in the road may reveal, what discoveries you may make in the hidden nooks and corners of the country you are penetrating. Many a long - to - be - remembered beauty spot and many an interesting place have I come upon owing to the easy art of losing my way.

Eventually, after much pleasant wandering through shady woods, our road began to climb in earnest, and brought us to an elevated and open stretch of country with wide views on either hand. High up thus in the world we looked down and over the far-reaching forest, an ocean of greenery fading away on the distant horizon into a dreamy blue—a study in the perspective of colour, for there is a perspective of colour as well as of line. It is a relief and a luxury for the eye at times to range and revel over vast spaces of land and sky, to realise that the atmosphere is something more than mere vacuity by the blueness it bestows on distances, so that we actually see what is supposed to be invisible! It is an excellent thing, when opportunity affords, to exercise the eyes in far seeing. To the sailor this exercise comes naturally; I have never met a short-sighted sailor nor a shepherd on

the wide downs yet, but the landsman who dwells mostly in towns, with his vision limited to house-bound streets, oftentimes becomes so.

Then we came to Stoney Cross, where we found ourselves still standing high above the wilderness of woods around. It must be a revelation of beauty to be there when, in the late autumn, the forest has put its glory on, when the greens have turned to gold and red, showing a riot of colour many a mile in extent; for Nature is prodigal of her tints when she chooses.

At Stoney Cross—a name that suggests the existence of a wayside cross there in the pre-Reformation days when all the land was strewn with such crosses—we found a comfortable and solitary inn with a pleasant garden attached and the real, unspoilt country around to wander over. I am afraid I am a trifle exacting in the choice of “mine hostelry,” for I am not perfectly content unless it be in the heart of the country, and unless it has a garden of some sort in which I can moon about and smoke a retrospective pipe at the end of the day’s journey. That is my ideal, and I am thankful to say that many such true “travellers’ rests” still exist. A fisherman’s inn is also my delight, for the followers of the “gentle art” make the best of good company, and generally there you will find cooking, plain, perchance, but of the best, or, as old Izaak Walton puts it, “a dish of meat too good for any but anglers or very honest men.” The motor car was not of his day, or he might have surely added, “the considerate motorist” who travels leisurely to

enjoy the country, and does not count the beauty of scenery by the mile, or the joys of a journey according to the pace. The gain of the motor car is not that we may speed from place to place in the least possible time (the railway will do this if we desire it), but that it enables us to see what lies between them, taking our own time on the way.

There is a saying in the New Forest that "a good bark year makes a good wheat year"; another saying is that "a beech tree is never struck by lightning." A local rhyme has it—

Ashwood when green
Is fire for a Queen,
Burn ashwood sare (dry)
'Twould make a King swear.

The first two lines are familiar to me, but the last two are fresh: the forest folk should know all about wood fires, for did not the foresters of old enjoy the right—they may enjoy it to this day for aught I know—to secure what dead branches they could for winter fuel provided they were pulled off the trees "by hook or crook," and not cut down. Hence, possibly, the familiar saying may have originated, though I take it the present-day meaning is by fair means or foul, not by fair means merely.

From Stoney Cross we drove along the top of an elevated upland for some miles, a tract of land open to all the sunshine and winds of heaven; and the wide arching sky above flooded the country all round with cheerful light; and light, how inspiring it is! We dipped down now and again into woods

deep in shade, and rose in turn on to bare, sunlit heaths whereon the hardy heather, the gorse, and coarse grasses were the only things that grew; acres and acres of purple heather and golden gorse that made a miracle of colour—burning, glowing colour—as gorgeous to behold as anything on earth can be. Little wonder that Linnæus, when he came one cloudless summer day unexpectedly upon an English common ablaze with gorse, stood still in astonishment, for that was his first sight of gorse! Yet England is considered to be a country wanting in colour!

As we drove on the homeless wind greeted us with the fragrance of the woods and of the gorse. A soft, sweet wind, balmy yet bracing, to inhale which made the mere act of breathing a luxury. The forest breezes, as they sweep over its uplands, have the quality of buoyancy and gladness; they are a tonic for mind and body, as enlivening as champagne, and are beyond suspicion pure; even the scenery was, to us, quite secondary to the vitalising air that was forced into our lungs as we sped joyously along.

Our road had only one fault—it was too straight to be perfectly beautiful; we saw too far ahead for our pleasure, so for a change we took a byroad at a venture, which took us to the secluded and pretty little village of Burley, buried in leafage; there we struck upon a narrow and stony lane that descended steeply to a wooded valley, and eventually landed us in the homely little town of Ringwood, a town beloved by anglers, for the fishful Avon flows

thereby, and you may purchase a ticket at one of the inns entitling you to catch both the wily trout and the lordly salmon—if you can. After all, the enjoyment of a day's fishing lies not wholly in the catch, but in the pleasant scenery presented to the angler, where the tranquil river glides and gurgles peacefully on, by hoary bridges and wooded banks, or it maybe foams and frets its way amongst the grey boulders that impede its course, with peeps of crags and mountain peaks beyond. So, should the angler return home with an empty creel, what matters it? A day's healthy outing in the open air, a heart and memory stored with the sweetness of beautiful surroundings, are surely reward sufficient?

Just beyond Ringwood we crossed the Avon, flowing broad and shallow, by a long old stone bridge, weathered into a delightful harmony of greys and greens by age and by constant moisture of the stream below; a bridge that has outlived generations of travellers, and will doubtless outlive generations still to be born; it witnessed the coming and the going of the mail coach with its cheery Jehu and its scarlet-coated, horn-blowing guard; then, after a lapse of time, it witnessed the coming of the motor car and the revival of road traffic—will it outlive the car, I wonder? These ancient bridges, that one so frequently comes upon driving about the country, were built to endure, besides being beautiful, for they nearly always possess lines of graceful form. The Dorset people, by notices prominently placed thereon, would appear to take

great care of their bridges. I give one of these by way of sample :—

DORSET

Any Person Wilfully Injuring
Any Part of this County Bridge
Will be Guilty of Felony and
Upon Conviction Liable to be
Transported for Life.

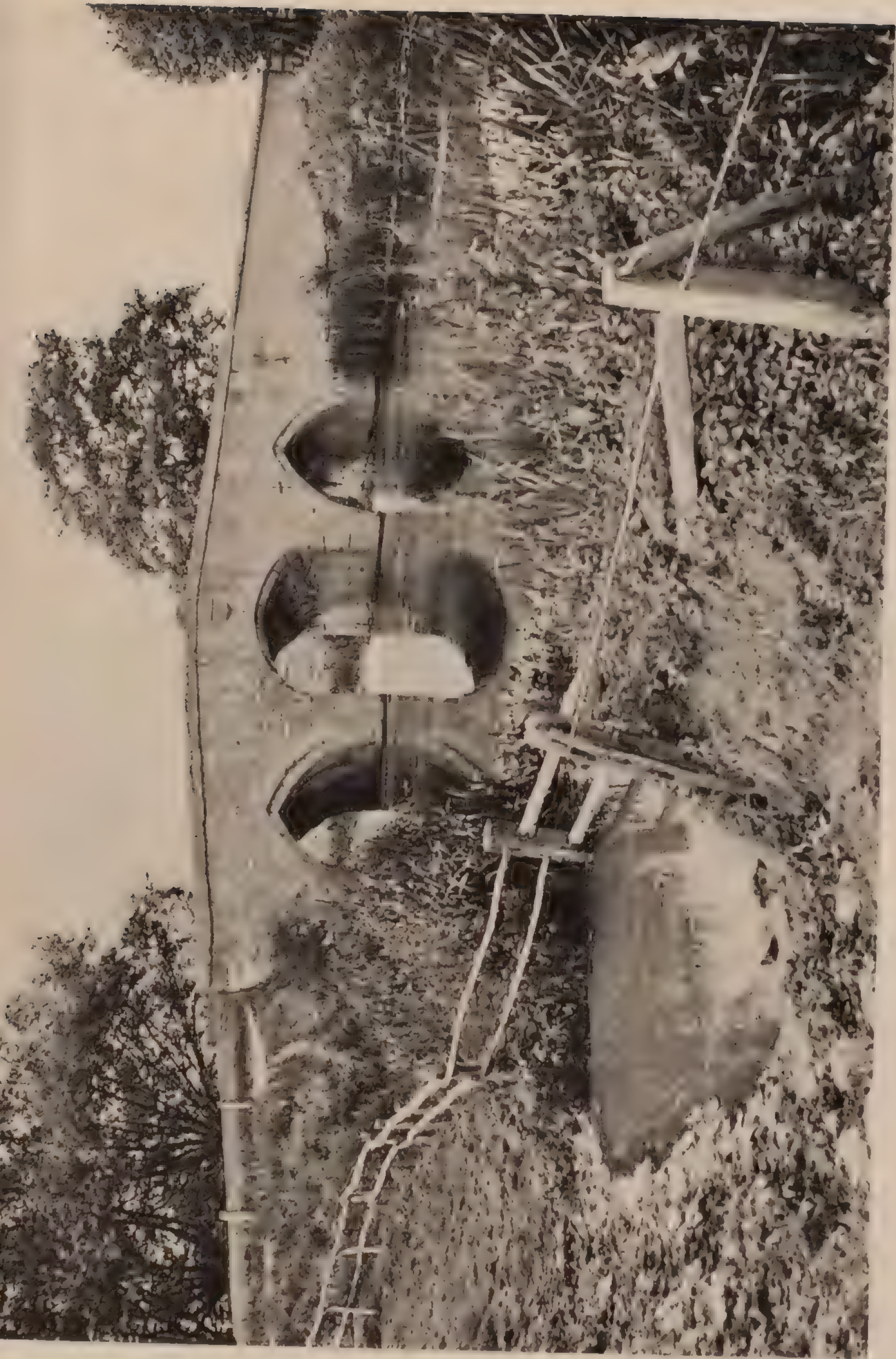
By the Court,

7 & 8 Geo. 4 C.

T. FOOKS.

Which is sufficiently severe.

But the traveller by road who merely passes over these old bridges sees but little of their beauty or realises what charming features they form in the landscape. Viewed a little way off, from the banks of the rivers and the streams they span, they make delightful pictures with their comely arches of varying shapes, some ribbed below ; their angle buttresses of weather-greied and water-worn stone, with the moss and lichen clinging lovingly to and painting their ancient sides and parapets. Some were built by the Pagan Romans, and many by the Christian monks, and still are standing strong, useful, and picturesque—a happy and a rare combination of excellent qualities. A photograph I took of one of these old bridges, a structure presumably of the far-off fourteenth century, I give reproduced here, and when, to the grace of its form, the mind's eye adds the charm of natural colouring, I think it will be conceded it makes a very pleasing picture—as, indeed, does nearly every ancient bridge in the land. It was quite by chance that I took



AN OLD BRIDGE.

this photograph, for on merely crossing the bridge I failed to notice any special picturesqueness about it, but having pulled up the car for lunch under some trees near by, upon afterwards wandering down by the narrow river my eye realised the charm of the old structure that has stood there for long centuries with little change. Even the arches are not all alike, the two outer ones being pointed and ribbed, and the central one of uncommon curve.

Then our road led us through a land of open heaths and pine-woods, all the air being laden with the warm, resinous odours of the pines. The soil looked poor enough to disgust the proverbial crow, but the country was strong in colour that day, for the sun shone on the heather, and the hills in the distance showed a tint distinctly purple even in spite of the greying effect of the depth of atmosphere between them and us.

Beyond the charm of its colouring and the feeling of openness given to the landscape by the extensive heaths, there was nothing noteworthy on the way until we came to Wimborne, a clean but dull little town—its fine old minster being the only beautiful or interesting feature in it, though so great is the charm and interest of this it readily makes one forgive and forget its commonplace setting of houses around. Possibly, indeed, the plain setting enhances the effect of the architectural gem; even ugliness has its uses as a foil to beauty—not that Wimborne is exactly ugly, but it is unattractive. As we had leisurely inspected the minster on a previous tour we did not stop to re-inspect it. It is a museum as

well as a place of worship, as most of our cathedrals are; possibly, indeed, during the summer season the many tourists who go there sight-seeing outnumber the worshippers. Of the many interesting things the minster has to show, perhaps the most so is its wonderful clock constructed early in the fourteenth century by a monk of Glastonbury, which, amongst other "facts," shows the sun and stars revolving round the earth according to the Church's teaching that then prevailed,—to deny which "fact," at any rate if you were a person of position, was to run the risk of being burnt at the stake as Bruno had been. It has always seemed passing strange to me that a man should be cruelly done to death for simply proclaiming the truth, and that by an "infallible" Church! I am afraid there was not much that was Christlike about medieval Christianity!

Corfe Mullen, the next place we came to, was a small, slumberous hamlet composed of a few scattered houses and a droning water-mill by the rush-grown river-side; it seemed a deserted village when we were there, for of its inhabitants none were visible, not even a stray dog or fowl. What, however, chiefly attracted us about the place was its delightfully picturesque old church standing solitary by the roadside—an unpretending little country church such as artists love. Indeed, it suggested a painter's or a poet's dream materialised, with its "ivy-mantled tower," its weather-stained walls, its quarrel-paned glass windows of the kind that let only a dim religious light filter through, its

lichen-laden and mossy roof, its grass-grown "God's acre," with the humble stones that mark the last resting-place of the forgotten dead, leaning over, their inscriptions wasted and wasting away, and its background of tall trees that overhung and darkened the fane of ancient devotion. It may have been the quiet light and the still hour that enhanced the effect, but there was something that appealed to our feelings about that lowly place of worship, it struck such a pathetic note. The stately cathedral one may admire, but the tiny village church one may love, which is the better thing; the former "seems to remove the Lord so far away," the latter, to my mind at least, comes nearer to the heart of the true worshipper, for the essence of Christianity is humility.

Gray's immortal *Elegy* came to mind as we wandered in that quiet spot, for it fitted well the scene, and even might have been written there, with the exception of two lines, for the spirit of the *Elegy* is not confined to one churchyard, but dwells in countless others scattered over all the land. The poetry of the country-side is everywhere, though we may not always see or feel it, for it depends on the observer as much as on the scene; and when we do feel it we may possibly only do so vaguely, so that, if we would, we cannot give our thoughts definite utterance; perhaps only a great and true poet can put the soul of things in words.

CHAPTER III

A pastoral country—The charms of a river—A finished town—An experimental holiday—Red-letter days—A mysterious carving—An ancient British stronghold—An unrecorded historical episode—Wayside crosses—A quiet valley—The value of the picturesque.

LEAVING Corfe Mullen we parted from the fragrant pine-woods and purple heaths and entered upon a peaceful, pastoral country. The scenery was pleasant enough, though without any special character ; to use an expression of Dr. Johnson's, it was "worth seeing, but not worth going to see." Our road led in a north-westerly direction up the tranquil valley of the Stour, and took us into the very heart of Dorset,—a land of verdant meadows, fertile farms, old gabled farmsteads, and thatched cottages, many of the last having their walls of mud, a land with low wooded hills for a background. As we drove on the gleaming river kept us welcome company for miles, now close at hand, now a little distance off ; like old friends, the road and river were ever meeting and parting. Without water no scenery, to me, is quite perfect ; water gives life and an added interest to the landscape, as clouds do to the sky ; birds haunt the water-side, cattle come down to it to drink or cool themselves, old mills hum soothingly on the

river bank, and now and again the sound of a tumbling weir brings refreshment to the ear; besides, the angler frequents the stream, and he is always a picturesque object; a stray artist too may be occasionally observed—one need never be dull in the company of a river.

As we drove on Blandford came into view, one of those pleasant little towns that seems finished; and what a rare and pleasant thing it is to find a finished town, one that has ceased to grow but not to flourish, one that has no ugly faubourg of garish modern villas growing up around, one that where the houses end the real country at once begins. Blandford pleased us; it is a clean, wide-streeted, sunny town; its buildings are substantial, though they possess no special character or architectural merit, yet in this age of showy pretence and cheap sham it is a relief to look upon good, honest work. The whole town was destroyed by fire in 1731, and its re-edifying began in that year of grace, if not of taste, when if men had lost the art of building beautifully they had, at any rate, not learnt the art of building badly. It is one of

The good old towns, where men are not ashamed to trade,
Nor let trade deaden life or love or strength in them.

Even in this progressive age there happily remain to us, in the pleasant west country, many such old-fashioned towns that have the charm of being finished, that are content to be what they are, and do not ape a greatness that is not theirs. To name a few of these as they occur to me at the

moment, there are Somerton, Ilchester, Langport, Berkeley, Tetbury, Wickwar, Winchcombe, Chipping Sodbury, Sturminster, and many others, whose population does not exceed four moderate figures, and possibly never will. There are many worse and more expensive ways of spending an unconventional holiday than by taking one's summer quarters in one of these remote and rural towns, and leisurely exploring the country about, at any rate such would be a new experience to many. I simply throw out the hint for what it may be worth. Should one be without horses or a motor car, these country hotels, as they do all the local posting, would be able to provide the explorer with a suitable conveyance as well, perchance, as a driver who knows the country for miles around, and the chief points of interest therein—possibly, too, the driver might prove a character, and be a profitable companion on such expeditions, having, as he most probably would have, all the traditions of the country-side at his command. The landlord, too, of a country inn may generally be consulted with advantage as to what is best worth seeing in the district. If he be one of the right sort he is generally well known to the local gentry, and may be able and willing to help you to see over some interesting old homes and places in the neighbourhood that otherwise you might not obtain permission to see, or even know of their existence.

I am not writing without some experience in the matter, for a few years ago, by way of experiment, I spent a short time at an old coaching hostelry



A COUNTRY INN.

situated in a small town in a western shire—a town that, I believe, has not increased in population for a century or more. I fancied the look of the place and the country around promised pleasant wanderings. I was fortunate in my hostelry and my host; my quarters were comfortable, clean, and unpretentious; moreover, the fare though plain was good. My host, too, confided to me that he had some rare old port in his cellar that had lain there longer than he could remember, but his ale was so good, and vastly less expensive, that I did not sample the wine. Whether it be pleasant fiction or fact I cannot say, but more than one old coaching-house I have put up at claims to possess port that has been there ever since the last coach was taken off the road in that particular part of the world.

It puzzled the landlord much that any one should come and stay there simply on pleasure bent, and for no other purpose; he could not comprehend how any stranger could care to hire a trap and drive about the country solely to see scenery that was in no way famous. "We have no guide-book to the neighbourhood," he exclaimed, as though no place were worthy of visiting that had not the honour of being written about. The novelty of the thing honestly surprised him. For my part I confessed that it was purely an experiment, as I was rather tired of tourist-haunted spots, and would like to make my own scenic discoveries. Finally, I arranged with him for the daily hire of a conveyance, with a man to drive it; so I set forth to explore the country around. The man was not wholly a success, for

his talk by the way was of nothing but horses; but he was a careful driver, and took me wherever I wished, so I was contented; moreover, he waited often and uncomplainingly, frequently for long times, whilst I explored old manor-houses, inspected ancient churches, halted at remote villages, talked with the friendly rural folk, made sketches, and took photographs. With all this to do, the long summer day was none too long, nor did I once find time hang heavily.

For my evening entertainment the landlord related for my special benefit all the local gossip and scandal free of charge, and I found further entertainment in the bar—albeit the atmosphere there was somewhat overcharged with tobacco smoke—listening to the conversation of the townspeople, to whom it served the purpose of a club. The conversation was not without interest and even humour, for there was more than one character in the assembly, and amongst the varied company a *Punch* artist or a novelist might have found excellent material for his pencil or his pen; moreover, I picked up curious items of local information, trading lore, and odd expressions. I give one as an example. Speaking of a man who, I gathered, was somewhat overbearing and commanding of voice, a member of the party exclaimed emphatically, “He wants a forty-acre field to talk in.” A widow, I learnt, was called “a lone woman”; and apropos of some subject, the remark was made “that it never existed no more than them amphibious animals did.” Yes, I think a *Punch* artist might have got more than

one drawing and joke there. Altogether I spent ten red-letter days at that place, finding during that time much of archæological and historic interest in the country around. I returned home well pleased with my experiment, and with a sketch-book filled with representations of picturesque and quaint old buildings and many charming bits of varied scenery. It was not an eventful holiday, but it was a very enjoyable one; and what can any one desire better than thoroughly to enjoy his holiday? Moreover, including even the daily hire of a trap, it was a very inexpensive outing.

Beyond Blandford the country had a quiet beauty of its own. Soon we came to the river again, for a space curving round thickly wooded slopes, and gliding along smooth and green in the shade of the overhanging trees—a spot to be remembered. Then we dipped down to a grey stone bridge, and crossing the Stour, found ourselves in the little village of Durweston, where we stopped to consult our map, when an old man, lazying on the road with a scraper in his hand, accosted us. He said he was hard at work, but I think that was a bit of imagination on his part. However, he explained that the purport of his coming to us was to show where we could get the keys of the church. “The party as keeps them lives down there,” he added, at the same time pointing indefinitely into space. Now we had no thought of seeing the church, and told him so. We presume that he just mentioned the detail of the keys with the object of easily earning a penny or two; still, as the man was aged

and bent and the day was hot, we gave him "the price of a glass of ale." This he received with thanks; then, after a moment's hesitation, he continued: "I think you should see the church if you have time; there's a rare funny carving in it of a man shoeing a horse with three legs. Nobody can make anything of it." So things of interest are brought unexpectedly to the notice of the wayfarer who does not rush through the land, but allows himself time to loiter on the road.

I am afraid we somewhat misjudged that man. Anyhow it was a novel experience to be recommended to see a church, and to be informed of what was of interest therein by a labourer. His remarks excited our curiosity, and we determined to see the carving. So obtaining the keys, we mounted the hill to the church, which stands a little above the village. Externally it proved to be a well-cared-for structure, but not noteworthy in any respect except for its fine and beautiful tower, built of chequered flint and stone.

Within all was neat and orderly, but uninteresting. We looked about carefully for quite a long time, and, we thought, everywhere for the mysterious carving without discovering it, and were about to leave the building, be it confessed, in an angry mood, feeling that we had been "sent on a fool's errand," when, looking up over the doorway as we were making our exit, we caught sight of the sculptured enigma. It was rather in a poor position for observation, being placed high up on the wall in the gloom of deep shadow. When our eyes got

accustomed to the dim light we made out, boldly carved in stone, what was probably intended to be the interior of a forge. On the left hand of this was shown a man—his head was missing—holding a detached fore-leg of a horse whilst nailing with uplifted hammer a shoe on to the hoof of it. On the left hand was a woman standing behind a horse with his fore-leg up to the shoulder removed. The point where the leg should join the body was represented as quite smooth, as though it had been cut off by one clean swoop—the horse standing patiently by on his remaining three legs apparently calmly watching the smith at his work! That the carving had a story to tell, local or otherwise, I have little doubt, but what that story was I have no idea. To me it remains an enigma in stone. At first it suggested St. Dunstan; but though he once shod the devil, I can find no other legend to connect him with the truly perplexing exploit so boldly proclaimed in sculpture. Nor in any book of reference since consulted can I discover anything to elucidate the mystery. That the carving is very old is manifest, but how old I should not care to venture an opinion.

Then we went in quest of the clerk, on the chance that he might possibly be able to throw some light on the matter, but, though the village was small, nowhere could we unearth him. Clerk-hunting is very uncertain sport, for you may run down your quarry at once, or hunt for hours and “draw blank.” However, we discovered his wife, who said he knew nothing about it, and she had

never heard of any one who did. So we had reluctantly to leave Durweston without solving the riddle of the mysterious carving.

The country now became somewhat hilly, and one bare hill, standing well out from amongst the rest, we noticed was topped by a series of grass-grown entrenchments, their outline being sharply revealed against the bright clear sky—an ancient British stronghold of some two thousand years ago. These earthworks, of all monuments of the past, are surely the most enduring; for with their covering of short, hardy grass they are protected from the destructive forces of frosts and storms, and so century after century goes by without any perceptible change in them. They are generally found on lonely heights given over to sheep and solitude, which doubtless tends to their preservation. Unlike many an ancient abbey and castle that, in times gone by, has formed a convenient ready-made quarry, and was thus utilised by the dwellers around to the hastening of its disappearance and decay, these grass-grown mounds happily offer no such inducement to the spoiler.

Graphic reminders of the never-returning past are the scarred old hills that prominently assert themselves in the landscape, so that you cannot pass them unregarded by. They tell their own story; they lend the charm of misty history to the beauty of the landscape. Age has fraught them with meaning, and the sentiment of the long ago hangs over them. They are a part of our history, and our history is part of ourselves. These ancient

earthworks make the troublous times of the Commonwealth seem but as yesterday, so do they lengthen out the perspective of our history. We asked a native in charge of a farmer's cart if he could tell us the name of the hill. He said it was called Hod Hill, but he knew nothing more about it. When we pointed out to him the entrenchments plainly showing, all he replied was, "Them's allus been there; we think nought of them." "Do you know who made them?" "Noa, I don't," he responded; "them was made afore my time." Well, perhaps it was too much to expect history of a native.

During a former journey, however, I did manage to unearth a unique bit of history from a country church clerk. If this native knew nothing of his surroundings and cared little about them, the clerk in question boasted he knew much, and was delighted to be informative, though oftentimes the value of information thus freely bestowed is in inverse ratio to the eagerness of the party to bestow it. The clerk, who appeared only too pleased to act as guide not only to his church but to the country around, related to me, with many precise details, how some of Cromwell's troopers had chased Queen Elizabeth, who was on horseback, over the road past his church and across the fields beyond, "and very nearly captured her." Moreover, he took me to a point of vantage and pointed out the very ground upon which this eventful episode took place, possibly in order that I might the better realise it. However, the clerk was an aged man, and the

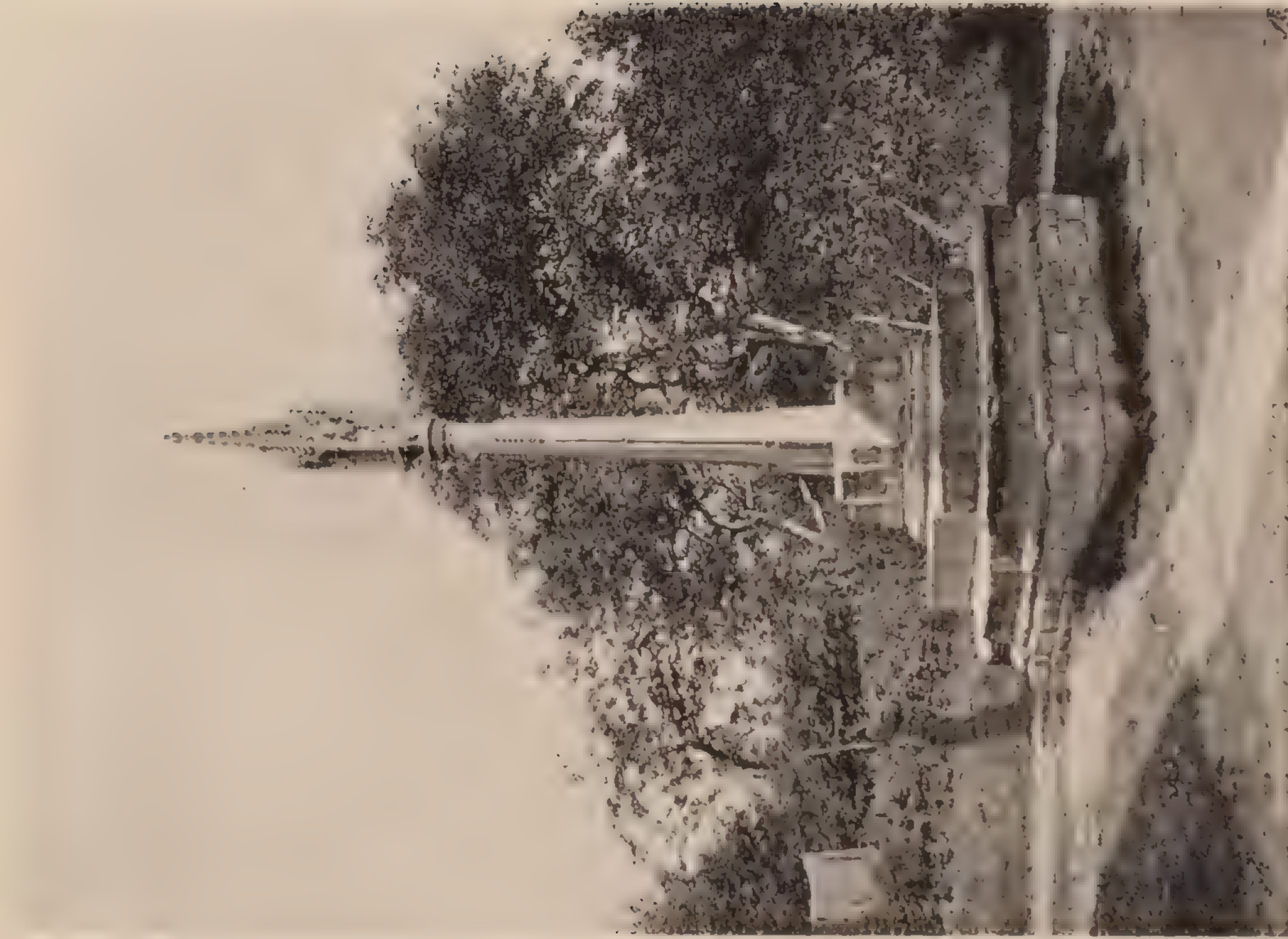
board school did not exist in his boyish days. Still, on another occasion a youngster, fresh from that seat of learning, who was acting as a self-appointed cicerone over an old castle, ruined, so he said, by Cromwell's soldiers, duly informed me that Cromwell was king of England!

Shillingstone, a long, straggling, old-fashioned village, picturesque with many thatched cottages, next claimed our attention. As we drove slowly through it our eyes caught sight of a fine stone cross standing by the side of the roadway. The steps of this were genuine antique, the rest was only too manifestly a restoration, still it formed a pleasing and an uncommon feature amid its homely surroundings. It came upon us as an agreeable surprise, and gave both a character and a point of interest to the village street. It was, allowing rein to our fancy, as though by some strange magic we had driven suddenly back into the medieval ages, and that there before us stood a new cross just erected by the monks! Only the preaching friar and crowd around were needed to complete the illusion!

If one may be so ungenerous as to be critical upon a well-intentioned and picturesque restoration, it appears to me that perhaps this reproduction of an ancient cross fails in some measure to satisfy, because it is too precise and too carefully executed, too little inspired, too much of a mere copy. With its well-proportioned shaft and pedimented tabernacle above, it has the form, though lacking the spirit, of the old work. It is too smooth, too



STALBRIDGE CROSS.



SHILLINGSTONE CROSS.

TWO DORSET CROSSES.

finished; the subtle touch of the carver, the mark of the craftsman's chisel on the stone are absent; the rapport with the workman is wanting. Perhaps the very perfection of modern tools militates against this. Could a machine produce such work, one feels that a machine might have done it. Now medieval sculpturing, with its varied surfaces and irregular regularities, is the very antithesis of the mechanical. Truly, work cannot be too good, but it may be over-refined, to the loss of all character, and character is more than finish.

Still it must be conceded that when age has toned down the fresh stone-work, when Time has rounded off a too sharp angle here and there, when the suns and storms of years have tinted it all over, when the clinging lichen has traced patterns of gold and silver upon it, the cross will be viewed to better pictorial advantage. The chief charm of old work lies with the inspired craftsman, but to this an added charm is undoubtedly due to the mellowing of age, and to the gathered sentiment that is the dower of all things ancient.

Possibly the photographs given here reproduced, of two Dorset crosses in close neighbourhood,—the one of Shillingstone, a modern restoration, the other of Stalbridge, ancient, weather-worn, and unrestored,—may serve to show, by their juxtaposition on the same page, the difference in character between the new and the old; though, unfortunately, the photograph of the latter, owing to the bad light at the time of taking it, does the original but scant justice, whilst the former had the

advantage of good lighting and a far better available point of view for the camera.

Every few miles of this quiet Dorset valley is dotted either with a tiny old-fashioned town or a pleasant little village, each and all of the slumberous order, for it is a land wherein hurry seems unknown and the calm of other days remains. It was not long after leaving Shillingstone before we found ourselves in Sturminster. We approached this by an ancient stone bridge of six pointed arches. From this bridge we had a delightful vision of an old mill, built of brick, but dusky with age, standing solitary by the river-side—a rambling, red-roofed structure with pigeon holes on one end gable. The mill reflected in the slowly-flowing stream in front, with a weir close by, white with tumbling water, and crossed by a little wooden footbridge, and a tree-clad hill behind, made a charming and complete picture, one of a kind that Birket Foster delighted to draw. The scenery of the valley, enshrined by gentle hills, was intensely English—scenery far removed from the smoke and ugliness of big cities and all modernity, and in the absence of modernity lay its great charm. The only noticeable exception, as far as I can remember, was the new cross at Shillingstone; but this was a minor matter, and even at that a copy of the old. The modern progressive world may be very good to live in, but it is not so good to look upon as the ancient one.

Sturminster turned out to be another tiny town, not remarkable in any way except for its naturalness. There we noticed the worn steps and the

stump of what was doubtless formerly a fine old cross ; the steps now apparently form a playground for children, whose pattering, nailed boots do not help to preserve this broken relic of the past. Sturminster is a very ancient town of small importance ; it has an ancient look, and that is about all I can remember of it. We did not stop there, for I am no worshipper of things old merely because they are old ; otherwise on this claim even flints might vastly interest me, for they were old before Stonehenge was begun. Now Sturminster is neither interesting nor picturesque, still it is not ugly, which is a negative virtue, and it is unsophisticated, which is a very real one. Though I have no recollection of the town beyond that it consisted of a street gradually widening to a square, of time-toned houses, no two of these being alike, and I fancy there was a tall church tower rising above them, still I shall always think pleasantly of the place, for there was nothing in it to annoy the eye. Seldom do I come to a town of any ancientness but there is something new, ugly, and crude therein that arrests my attention, whether I will or no, for oftentimes such obtrusive things assert themselves out of all proportion to their size or importance, and being out of harmony with their surroundings destroy the picturesqueness of a place. There are many societies in the world, some useful, some the reverse, others merely ornamental ; I wish there was one for the preservation of the picturesque, but this, I presume, is the desire of the unattainable.

It should not be forgotten that, even considered

commercially, the picturesque may be a profitable possession, for do not people travel in search of it, and spend money where they are attracted? I know a certain village, almost unspoilt by modern innovations, and very charming it is with its quaint old Tudor houses, its creeper-covered cottages, its setting of wooded hills sloping to the west and the setting sun; a village that is a perfect haven of rest for the city dweller weary "of clamouring bells and the whirl of wheels that pass," of the din and bustle of crowds, of society's tiresome treadmill, and of the dreary desolation of a wilderness of smoke-stained bricks and mortar; a spot to laze in, or to sketch and photograph, as the mood inclines, for it is full of pictures and pleasantness—and how delightful it is, if only for a time, to live in the midst of beautiful surroundings; that surely is the wine of life!

Solely on account of its old-world beauty artists flock thither, and some take up their abode in the village; tourists, too, of the gentle type, find their way there and, when there, are tempted to stay awhile. It is also favoured with a comfortable and ancient hostelry, a relic of the coaching age that pilgrims in the search of quiet and beauty have rescued from oblivion and decay; money is thus brought and spent in the place to the advantage of the landlord of the inn, and indirectly to its inhabitants, to whom a portion of it filters down, and who thus mildly prosper on the romantic attractions of their village as they would not otherwise prosper—to say nothing of the many cottagers

who let apartments to artist-visitors, their friends, and others ; and all this comes about solely owing to the unspoilt picturesqueness of the spot. The village has a contented, cared-for look. The inhabitants (taught possibly by the artist who first discovered it) have learnt the value of their quaint old houses ; they are now prized, protected, instead of being ruthlessly pulled down ; their ancient charms preserved. They take a manifest pride and interest in them ; they realise that they bring visitors to the place, and that visitors bring money. So, to repeat myself, the picturesque may be a profitable possession ; take that away from the village and its present mild prosperity would probably vanish for ever—for there is nothing else for it to prosper on.

CHAPTER IV

Pleasant wandering—Stalbridge cross—A truthful tramp—Where Sir Walter Raleigh had his pipe extinguished—A character—A chat by the way—A guide who failed—Wincanton—Photographs as guides to places—Arm-chair travel—Country life.

FROM Sturminster our way led us along a devious lane ; I think somehow we missed the regular road up the valley, a fact that caused us no regret, for the lane was shady and the sun was shining warmly down. Besides, any day, a lane, indirect and crooked though it generally proves, is more to be desired than a dusty highway for one on pleasure bent : a lane, by its nature, leads one into the very heart of the land where the primitive and picturesque is most likely to be found, and where the mellow country-side is revealed at its best. If you want to enjoy a day's drive in the country, and you travel for the sake of rural revelations alone, turn down a lane whenever you can, careless of direction ; trust the lane to take you where it will—it will lead you somewhere, be satisfied with that. Each bend in a lane is a fresh picture—you know not what surprises may await you round the coming corner—and the bends of a lane are many !

The landscape we passed through had a pleasant

look, though, as Dr. Johnson once remarked anent the country, it was mainly composed of "a succession of trees and green fields," for we had, just then, lost sight of the river as well as the distant hills, and the houses on the way were few, and those mostly half drowned in foliage. But "a succession of trees and green fields"—fields here a golden green in sunshine, and there dappled with grey shade—makes very pleasant, if uneventful, wandering. We desired nothing better for the moment, and as there were no special features in the scenery to attract our attention, we drove slowly on in a sort of daydream, for though a motor car can go faster than any horse, it can go as slowly as its owner wishes: a simple fact that scarcely needs to be mentioned, though some people hardly realise it!

Then when our Devonshire-like lane came to an end we found ourselves at Stalbridge, another town of the small, somnolent, and ancient order that is so refreshing to meet with in these days of overgrown cities, from which the green country seems so far away, and the blue sky above appears grey seen through the haze of incumbent smoke. It must be delightful to live in a small town and to be able, at any time, to take a stroll in the meadows, lanes, and footpaths around without undue exertion, and without the extraneous aid of train, tram-car, or bus, to say nothing of the loss of time such aid entails.

In Stalbridge we discovered a beautiful and exceptionally fine wayside cross, well proportioned,

graceful in outline, and elaborately carved; one, moreover, that has happily escaped restoration—and restoration, unless absolutely necessary, is the cruellest kind of destruction; nothing except, perhaps, dynamite is so sure. Truly it is somewhat weather-worn and darkened by age, otherwise it is, I venture to say, just as the monkish sculptor left it. It is the best preserved and, on the whole, the finest and the most interesting cross of its kind that I know; even the square base that supports its shaft has richly carved panels and corner pillars; on the shaft itself, and under a canopy, is a figure of our Saviour done in bold relief, and at the top a richly ornamented tabernacle crowns this work of ancient art and devotion.

The wonder to me is how this cross escaped the Puritan fury; perhaps it was because it had a tabernacle on the top in place of the more usual cross, for a cross in any form was to the Puritan as a red rag is to a bull. By an Order of Parliament in the year 1643, “All crosses in any open place” were to be removed and destroyed—and their stone shafts came in useful as posts for doors, garden gates, and stiles, besides being much sought after by farmers to erect in their fields as “rubbing-posts” for their cattle!

The only structure of the kind, as far as I am aware, that has been preserved to us with its original cross still *in situ*, and that has remained undisturbed there since the fourteenth century, is one that stands in Bosbury churchyard, a spot four miles from Ledbury. This cross owes its

exceptional preservation solely to the strenuous pleading of the then vicar of the parish with the commander of the Parliamentary soldiers, who had come to destroy it. The commander must have been less of a bigot than most of his companions-in-arms, for he allowed the cross to remain unhurt on the condition that the following inscription was promptly and plainly engraved thereon—

Honour not the ✠
But honour God for Christ,

which inscription can be traced there to this day—a pleasing bit of local history.

Many such stories of the past may still be gleaned by the traveller who loiters in likely out-of-the-way spots; at least such is my experience. If you desire to unearth these old histories and traditions you must be ready to chat with any one you chance to meet, from the squire down to the garrulous gaffer; and the gaffer is generally at command, only too delighted to find a ready listener to his rambling prattle of things past and half forgotten. Of course by so doing you run a great risk of gleaning nothing of any real interest, and losing a lot of time; sometimes, however, valuable information comes from the most unlikely people. You can never tell beforehand. A dirty and dusty tramp, who begged of us on the road, revealed to me the existence of a wonderfully picturesque old moated manor-house, that but for him I should have missed seeing, as, though close at hand, it was effectually hidden by trees from the

highway. "They won't mind you walking up to the place to see it," said the tramp, "for they are kind-hearted folk, who always give a poor hungry man a bite, or a copper or two, as I am sure a good gentleman like yourself would be doing," and so forth in superabundance. We took the hint. Some odd "coppers" changed ownership, the tramp went his way rejoicing, and we went to inspect the ancient home whose existence we took on trust. Going up a narrow road that gave no suggestion of leading anywhere in particular, we suddenly caught sight of the grey gables of a most picturesque old place surrounded by a weed-grown moat. Our approach to the house was disputed by a savage-looking dog, whose manner was so threatening that we nearly beat a hasty retreat; however, at that moment the owner luckily appeared on the scene, and apologised for the dog. "You see," he exclaimed, "I'm compelled to keep him to drive the tramps off. Before I had a dog they gave us no peace; now they know better than to trouble us." I am afraid our tramp was a bit of a humbug, but he did put us in the way of seeing a very interesting old home!

Proceeding on our way we next called a halt at Henstridge Ash, a tiny hamlet, the name of which may be remembered (it has no other cause for fame) owing to the long-established tradition that it was at the "Virginia Tavern" there, or rather on the circular stone seat outside, where Sir Walter Raleigh was sitting quietly smoking his pipe, when the maid, coming out with a flagon of ale, alarmed

by seeing a man, as she thought, on fire, promptly dashed the ale over him to extinguish it.

The inn stands solitary, a little apart from the hamlet, at one corner of four cross roads, with the following inscribed on its front, "The Old Ash or Virginia Inn." The extensive seat, looking much like a low circular wall with flat stones set all around the top, has a flourishing young ash tree growing from its centre—a successor of the aged one, under the shelter of which Sir Walter Raleigh is supposed to have been seated, smoking his historic pipe, when the above much-recorded event is said to have taken place. Another tradition, faithful to the locality, though not to the precise spot, has it that Sir Walter was within the house seated on an oak chair, but the tendency of tradition favours the stone seat. An old carved oak chair, reputed to be the one in question, and with its pedigree attached, I saw, a year or two back, in the White Hart Hotel at Beaconsfield.

I was photographing this storied inn and curious circular seat hard by when a stranger came up and related to me the above particulars in case I was unaware of them, for which thoughtfulness I duly thanked him. He appeared very pleased to be informative, as people often are; he, however, objected to the term tradition, for he said, "The happening is a historic fact," laying much emphasis on the word "fact." Now, as the party was a perfect stranger, and as he did not reveal his identity, I know not with what authority he spoke; he addressed me in a pleasant, low voice, was mild

of manner, and possessed a marked individuality—to use an antiquarian's pet expression, I could not quite "sum him up." He was dressed in a very faded tweed coat, and on his head he wore a bowler hat that did not suit him, by his side he carried a small satchel, his boots were very dusty, as though he had walked far. What was his vocation in life I could not faintly guess—but that was no business of mine, still he aroused my curiosity ; his speech was refined, he might have been a learned professor, for you cannot judge a man by his clothes.

From his talk he was manifestly much interested in old things and old places. He asked me where we were going next, and I told him to Wincanton, where we hoped to find a decent inn for the night as the day was growing old. "Then," he exclaimed, "you will pass through Horsington ; you ought not to miss the cross there, it is of a very uncommon type." He had previously told us of the crosses at Shillingstone and Stalbridge which we had already seen. "You're a bit of an antiquary?" I queried, in the hope that perhaps the stranger might be led to say something about himself and why he was tramping about the country alone. "Yes," came the reply, "I'm very fond of everything that's old, especially old buildings. I'm taking a walking tour and making sketches by the way. Perhaps you might care to see some of them. It's very pleasant to meet an appreciative stranger." We returned the compliment, whereupon he pulled a fat sketch-book from out his pocket, filled with excellent pen-and-ink drawings of old houses and

odd bits of bygone architecture. "You draw capitally," I remarked. "Well," he responded, "I've had a lot of experience in pen-and-ink work; it's the best way of sketching when touring, for your drawings don't get smudged, and you can get in a lot of detail easily. I simply use a fountain pen in place of a pencil."

More as an excuse to prolong the conversation than anything else, I ventured to ask him to take a glass of ale with me in view of the inn conveniently at hand. Possibly I made a mistake in acting so, for he politely declined my suggestion, declaring he was a teetotaller, but not a bigoted one, whatever might be hidden under that expression. Few and far between are the teetotallers I meet on the road! Did I lower myself in his estimation, after our talk about art, in offering him a glass of ale? I wonder if he thought to himself, "He who drinks beer thinks beer." Still, "jolly good ale and old" is no bad beverage on a hot summer noon; moreover, it is the only liquid refreshment you can obtain at a wayside inn with the reasonable assurance of its being palatable and wholesome. Even Longfellow declared that he found ale a source of inspiration, and that "Bass's bottled beer was the product of English civilisation that impressed him most"!

You buy land, you buy stones,
You buy meat, you buy bones,
You buy eggs, you buy shells,
You buy ale, you buy nothing else.

However, be the cause what it might, upon

declining my offer of refreshment the stranger bade us a hasty good-day and proceeded on his way and we went ours. In the next village, Yeanstone we made it out to be from our map, we noticed, on a spare bit of ground by the roadside, a replica of the curious circular seat at Henstridge Ash, only on a smaller scale, and with a yew tree growing out of its centre instead of an ash. I have never come upon seats of the kind before ; possibly they are due to the genius of some local builder long gone to his rest.

Arriving at Horsington we looked out for the cross which the stranger had told us of, but no sign of it was visible ; so we asked a boy standing idly by if he knew anything about it. " Yes, I does," he replied, " it be down yonder," pointing to a lane leading out of the village street. " Will you take us to it for twopence ? " we next queried, whereupon he expressed his willingness to do so, but said he would like the twopence first ! Having duly received and carefully pocketed his " fee " he led the way and we followed him. " What is the cross like ? " we asked. " It's a big building," he replied ; " I've been inside it ; you'll see it directly." This information somewhat mystified us, and even led us to expect an arched structure such as that of Chichester. Would it prove to be one of the " finds " of our tour ? we wondered. Alas ! we were doomed to disappointment, but such is the lot of the explorer.

The boy presently stopped before a brand new building that we took to be the village hall, exclaim-

ing as he did so, "The cross be inside that," whereupon he walked away and left us disillusioned! We came to the conclusion that the ancient cross had been removed and placed within the building for its better preservation. Fortunately the door was open, so we went inside, only to find some workmen there and bare walls around, but no signs of what we were in search. We then told one of the workmen the object of our visit, but he said there was no cross there, and went on with his work without further remark. Just then a sudden and uncomfortable feeling came over us that perchance the workman thought us two wandering lunatics! There was nothing to do but to leave the place, for the boy had departed without giving any explanation as to his statement. I am inclined to think that he did not know what the cross was, but not wishing to lose the rare chance of earning an "honest" twopence had conducted us to the village hall in case it might be in it!

On our way back to the car we met a young lady with a dog, and we ventured to ask her about the mysterious cross. She said, "There is an old stone stump on some steps a little farther on; perhaps that's what you are looking for," and she kindly directed us to the spot. So we set forth again on our search—and discovered it! The cross, set on three circular steps, is a good deal weather-worn, but otherwise fairly perfect, except that its top had been broken off. The shaft rising from a shaped stone base was remarkable from having on the front of it a fairly preserved carving of the figure of a

robed monk ; this was supported on a slightly projecting corbel and surmounted by an ornamented canopy. To the antiquary, doubtless, this cross, though mutilated, is of considerable interest, owing to the unusual figure of a monk thereon, but to the ordinary uncritical observer there is nothing specially noteworthy about it.

A short and pleasant drive from Horsington brought us in sight of Wincanton, set effectively upon a wooded hill so as to proclaim itself some distance off. Generally in a small country town there is to be found one inn that is unquestionably the best ; sometimes there is only one, though there is sure to be a sprinkling of public-houses, so that not unfrequently the traveller's choice is that of Hobson's. Now, Wincanton, though small in size, actually offered us a choice of two hotels that stood only a few yards apart ; these erst-time coaching hostelries greeted us, as we drove in, with bold advertisements on their ancient fronts to the effect that they catered especially for motorists—so have times changed ! As, judging by the outside appearances—which the familiar proverb says you should not do—the hotels seemed of equal merit, we solved the difficulty of selection by driving up to the nearest one, and found we had the whole house to ourselves.

The boots who took our baggage in hand, in reply to some question of ours, said he had only just come there, but in his opinion (which we did not ask, by the way) Wincanton was “a funny place and an awfully dull one to live in.” However, we

assured him that we did not propose to live in the town, but only to stop one night there. Stabling the motor, we took a stroll of inspection round the place, but could discover nothing "funny" about it; to us it appeared quite like an ordinary country town; it was not beautiful, it was not ugly, it was merely characterless. Its situation on a wooded hill slightly elevated above the surrounding country was delightful, but you require more of a town than a pleasant situation. The only interesting facts that I could gather about Wincanton, and these I gleaned from an old Directory, were that in 1688 it was the scene of a sharp skirmish between the soldiers of William of Orange and those of James II., and that at an earlier period there was a fierce fight in its streets between the forces of Charles I. and those of the Parliament; but past events do not appeal to the eye, nor are those mentioned of much importance or wide renown.

Wincanton's fine old church has been so restored as to look, externally at any rate, like new, so we did not trouble to inspect it; otherwise generally when a town fails to interest us we turn to its church, where there is just a possibility that some past history of the place may be, directly or indirectly, discovered. But in the present case both town and church proving unattractive we returned to our hotel, and after revising our notes made on the way, we spent the rest of the evening endeavouring to get what entertainment we could out of a copy of Bradshaw and an old dictionary—the only available literature at hand. Now, according to an

aphorism of Emerson's, "A dictionary is not a bad book to read. There is no cant in it, no excess of explanation, and it is full of suggestion." In proof of this assertion I am tempted to quote here the definition of the word "sea-serpent" as given in *Chambers's Dictionary*. This then is it: "An enormous marine animal of serpent-like form, frequently seen and described by credulous sailors, imaginative landsmen, and common liars." Who, after that, can say that a dictionary makes bad reading? And this is only one extract of many, equally interesting and informing, I could make. As for the Bradshaw we managed to pass a pleasant enough hour with it, planning how quickly, and with how few changes, we could go from one distant, out-of-the-way place to another, and when tired of this we turned to the advertisement pages, and by their descriptions, aided by pictures, in imagination visited quite a number of delightful spots. Arm-chair travel has the advantage of being costless, speedy, and is delightful by its absence of effort, inconvenience, noise, or bustle. With a suitable book you can travel thus, safely and at ease, the wide world over, in countries new or old, savage or civilised; you can take a modest donkey jaunt with Stevenson; if the sea takes your fancy you can go a-cruising or whale-catching with Bullen; you can cross Africa, or go to far Japan, or you can explore the Arctic regions with Nansen and others, or the Antarctic with Captain Scott; you can even go fighting in an ironclad (secure as to life and limb) in company with Captain Semenov; moreover,

you can start on any of these expeditions at a moment's notice! The ordinary Bradshaw has the disadvantage of confining your travels to England, and, the glowing hotel advertisements apart, forces you to do your own romancing.

Before starting next morning we explored a shop where they sold photographs and picture post-cards, on the chance that we might find amongst the number representations of places of local interest that might give us a hint as to anything worth seeing. Indeed, we always made it a point to visit such shops we came across on the road, as should there be a place of interest in the neighbourhood the local photographer frequently has a print of it; not only this, but he may be able and willing to give you further particulars that are useful; and after inspecting a photograph you can generally form some idea what a place is like and if worth visiting. It is not always safe to place implicit faith in word-of-mouth descriptions unless you are prepared for disappointments, but photographs are most helpful.

During our tour we thus learnt the existence of many places of interest that otherwise, probably, we should never have heard about. In this instance we came upon a photograph of a very picturesque old manor-house called Lytes-Cary, and as we found that the house lay but a short distance off our proposed route for the day, we at once determined to see it if possible. Another photograph that we saw and purchased excited our curiosity, for there was a suggestion of romance about it. The print showed an ancient chapel, presumably a private

one attached to some old historic home; it was an interior view revealing a narrow building having rough-hewn walls, with an open, high-pitched, great beamed roof above; at the farther end was a rude Gothic window, and below this, apparently, an altar. The walls were hung all over with ancient armour, helmets, breastplates, swords, shields, and pikes, a large and interesting collection. From the roof above hung several long, pointed banners with coats-of-arms worked or painted thereon. On the bare floor were several old inscribed tombstones, and raised above it were two altar-tombs, on one of which we could just make out a recumbent effigy of what appeared to be a mail-clad warrior. I never saw a photograph that interested me more. "Whatever else we see, we must see that chapel," I exclaimed, but there was no name attached to the print, and when we asked the girl who served us where the place might be she replied she did not know. This was most tantalising, but she added, "I believe it's somewhere near here," which was provokingly indefinite. However, as she knew no more it was useless further questioning her. Inquiries at the hotel were of no avail, nor were other inquiries we made at the various places where we stopped on the road more successful. I have still the photograph by me, and live in hopes that one day I may discover the original, for I have serious thoughts, at some convenient time, of returning to Wincanton and leisurely exploring the country around in quest thereof.

Of the country out of Wincanton for some miles

I have now but a faint memory, beyond that it was pleasantly undulating and well wooded, with occasional peeps, to the west, of rounded hills. It was a purely pastoral land, but, as Lord Beaconsfield once remarked, "Pastoral scenery never palls. The eye may tire of mountains and the more stupendous efforts of Nature, but meadow and woodland never lose their charm." Such scenery is not stirring to the imagination, but it strongly appeals to the rest-seeking pilgrim, for a slumberous calm pervades it that is better than any medicine for jaded nerves; and the life of the fields, how tranquillising it is! what a delightfully lazy existence the cows seem to lead therein, slowly munching the grass, or standing beneath the shade of the trees listlessly whisking the flies with their tails, and the time-mellowed farmsteads that dot the country-side, how suggestive they are of a dreamy, contented existence!

At one village we came to—the name of which has escaped me, but its picturesqueness remains pleasantly impressed on my memory—we noticed plainly displayed on a board in front of a stone-built cottage the magic word "Petrol," a word that had no meaning, and even with many others did not exist less than twenty years ago—so is our vocabulary increasing. As it was a quiet spot we pulled up there and replenished our running tank with the needful spirit. A young woman came forth and provided us with what we required; we casually expressed our surprise to her at finding petrol sold at a cottage in such an out-of-the-way district.

“ You may well call it out-of-the-way,” she exclaimed ; “ it’s awfully dull here, there’s nothing doing, nothing to do, and no life about the place. You see I’ve lived in London all my life and am used to the town ; I don’t feel as how I shall ever get used to the country, but I’ve got married, and has to live in it ; my husband is away all day and I feel terribly lonely at times. It is a relief to have even a stranger to talk to. The greatest excitement we have is when a motor car passes by, it makes it a bit cheerful like for the moment. We started selling petrol not so much for the profit of the thing, as because it gives me something to do when my man’s away, and when a car stops here it enlivens me up a bit, and it gives me some one to pass the time of day with.” Certainly I have never before heard of business being conducted on those lines, but one travels and gathers experiences. “ It does seem strange to me,” the woman continued, “ to have no lamps in the road, so on a dark night we have to carry a lantern with us to see where we be going. The country be that depressing even a good husband don’t make up for it.” Perchance some day that worthy woman may have children clambering on her knees, and then she may see things differently, and find that after all life is worth living—even in a village !

It must be remembered that the delights of the country are not for every one. Charles Lamb, “ the gentle Charles,” would have none of its “ deadly dulness” ; Dr. Johnson, in his pompous manner, abused it mightily, and many another famous man

has "damned it with faint praise"; whilst Mrs. Craigie, in cultured English, thus expresses her views of country life, "Oh, those long days in the country—days of anxiety without distraction, of patient waiting for letters—no matter from whom—which never come; days of trivial necessary tasks impossible to shirk, yet so wearisome in their accomplishment; days when life can promise neither love, nor youth, nor even death—when the world seems a mighty grind-mill where slaves eternally toil without rest and without hire." Well, we cannot all be Richard Jefferies! J. S. Mill relates in his *Autobiography* how in times of depression he found a cure in Wordsworth, and was made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in the tranquil contemplation of the country-side. So what is deadly dull to one man is infinite rest to another.

CHAPTER V

A sleepy hamlet—A picturesque and ancient manor-house—The kindness of strangers—A drowsy land—Miles from anywhere—An old priest's house—Tact—Muchelney Abbey and abbot's house—A quaint bit of carving—The finest church tower in Somerset—A hanging chapel.

AFTER a pretty stretch of country we found ourselves in the sleepy little hamlet of Puddimore (as we afterwards learnt, for at the time we had no idea where we were). Here we pulled up—if that is the right term for the stopping of a motor car—in order to make inquiries as to whether Lytes-Cary might possibly be in the neighbourhood. Unfortunately we could not find Lytes-Cary marked on our map, but some way back we were told that it was about four miles farther on the road, and our odometer showed that we had over-run that distance. Puddimore consists of only a few cottages, a farm-house with outbuildings, and a tiny church in due proportion to the place.

I should imagine that it would take a great deal to waken Puddimore from its ancient tranquillity. A more drowsy spot I have seldom come upon. Not even the arrival of our car, or the loud sounding of the horn thereof, aroused the curiosity of a single

inhabitant, at least no one appeared on the scene. Perhaps the youthful population, though few in number, were at school. However, after much search, we caught sight of a carpenter leisurely at work in a sort of barn, and when we went up to ask him if he could direct us to Lytes-Cary, he appeared bewildered at the sight of a stranger and could only exclaim, "Where be you come from?" We replied that we had come from a good many places, and wanted to go to Lytes-Cary; did he know if it were anywhere in the neighbourhood? He took some time to think the matter over, then putting down his tools he said, "Why, of course I do; it's little better than a mile from here. You mean the old farm-house they be a-restoring?" To make quite sure we showed him the photograph of the place we had purchased at Wincanton. "That be it right enough," he responded. "A gentleman has bought it, and is spending a lot of money there, though I could never see much in it. He's got a lot of men at work on the old house; they say as how he be going to make a fine place of it." This was not exactly the news we expected or cared to hear. Then he walked slowly down to the car with us, pointed out the way, and told us the turnings to take. Not only did he do this, but he drew, and drew well and clearly, a rough sketch of our road, even pencilling down a signpost, a farm-house, and a cottage we should have to pass, so that we could not possibly miss it. I have never been so plainly directed anywhere before. After all, our carpenter, having recovered from his surprise at

being accosted when at work by an utter stranger apparently dropped from the clouds, turned out trumps.

We thanked him for his information, and remarked, "You live in a pretty village, though it seems rather a quiet one." "Well," he said, "it's right enough in the summer-time, but you should see it in the winter when the water is out; after a lot of rain the place is flooded, and sometimes you cannot even drive along the road. Why, the other winter the water rose so high as to put the fires out in all the houses, so that nobody got any dinner, and on Sunday we could not get to church." "But how did the parson manage?" we queried. "Oh, the parson he lives agin the church, and he has not far to go; besides, he be paid to go, which makes a difference." This turn in the conversation called our attention to the church, which we noticed possessed a somewhat uncommon feature in the shape of an octagonal tower, and in its lonely God's acre we discovered the moss-grown steps and broken stump of a decayed cross. In the porch is a projecting stone holy-water stoup; the only other thing of interest being its bell, dated 1633, and bearing the following inscription, for the men of the period were given to express their piety in words:—

Repent, I say, be not too late,
Thyself at all times redy make.

Leaving Puddimore, we soon came in sight of Lytes-Cary, its grey gables, roofs, and chimneys peeping over some trees a little distance from the

road. A gentleman was leaning against the gate that opened on to the drive leading to the ancient home. Who he was, of course, we did not know, but we ventured to ask him whether he could tell us if it were possible to see the house. He promptly responded, "Certainly you can. I will show you over it with pleasure if you will drive in. I'm the owner!" This was a bit of wholly unexpected good fortune, an act of courtesy and kindness we greatly appreciated, and I trust we expressed our thanks befittingly. In truth, it seemed to us that during our journey "wherever we met a stranger, there we found a friend."

A short drive brought us to the delightfully picturesque old-time home, a veritable "haunt of ancient peace," a romance in stone—a poem rather than a place—with its weather-stained and ivy-grown walls, its mullioned windows, its many gables, some surmounted by stone-carved heraldic finials, its projecting porch with an oriel window above, and its private chapel beyond. To our delight we quickly discovered that this most charming specimen of a small manor-house, made beautiful with the bloom of centuries, was being both judiciously and lovingly restored backwards to the scheme and intention of its original builder, gone to his rest how many years ago?

The hands that builded it
Long are dead,
The souls it sheltered
From earth have fled.

That restorations are sometimes necessary is a

sad fact, unless a building be allowed to disappear in the inevitable decay that comes in time to all things. Sadder still is it when restoration, as it too often does, spells practically the destruction of the spirit and history of a place; but in the case of Lytes-Cary restoration meant simply a happy preservation of its ancient features, and the removal of modern innovations within and without.

First, we were shown by our courteous host the interior of the chapel, which, on taking possession, he found bare and in a melancholy state of dilapidation, and, except that it had been cleared of rubbish, it was in the same state when we were there, for its reparation was a matter that required careful consideration. At the east end of the chapel is a Gothic window, the tracery being of good design. The two windows at the side are square-headed, and none of them now contain any stained glass. Running round the top of the walls, and immediately below the open timber roof, a series of coats-of-arms is emblazoned, but their colouring is much faded—some have even faded almost all away. There are two inscribed tablets in the chapel, one of which reads—

This Chapel being founded by William
Lyte Legate atte Lawe tempory Edward I.
Was in the seventh yeare of King Charles I.
Newly repaired by Charles Lyte Esquire
And Dame Constance hys wyfe

A.D. 1631,

which shows that the building was originally erected early in the fourteenth century. "People," remarked

our host, as I was copying this, "were very religious in those days. A country house of any pretensions then had its chapel and its attendant priest." Poorer people had to do without these luxuries, and I trust that their souls do not suffer in consequence. It was an age when our wealthy ancestors took their religion not only seriously, but strangely, if it be true, as recorded, that a certain noble lord obtained absolution beforehand from his private priest for the deliberately planned murder of an enemy of his! That reminds me of the thrice-told story, which may still be fresh to some of my readers, of a quarrelsome knight on his deathbed who, in a reply to his father confessor, "if he forgave all his enemies," exclaimed, "I have none, holy father; I have killed them all!"

From the house is a double squint into the chapel. The precise purpose of this I could not divine, unless it were to allow the master of the house to witness the service at his convenience without being in attendance; or else, which seems more probable to me, to see that all his servants duly put in an appearance. There is also another curious spy-hole in the porch which commands the chapel door, the reason of which is not very clear.

We were next taken to view the hall, and a very beautiful hall it is, not very large, but large enough. The roof of this is of open timber, high pitched, and the oak beams are elaborately carved. At one end of this apartment is a slightly raised dais. The hall, we were informed, was built in 1533, yet in such excellent condition were the ancient timbers of the

roof that only one or two had to be replaced, proving with what care and judgment the men of old selected their material, and proving also the enduring quality of good English oak. The very interesting Saxon church of Greenstead in Essex, that was built about the year 1013, still retains its original walls, constructed of the trunks of oak trees, and is a striking specimen of the lasting character of that timber.

From the hall we were taken to the withdrawing room, a fine apartment well lighted by a large bay window, and still retaining its panelling. In renovating the floor of this the foundations of a still more ancient building were revealed below, of which nothing now is known. Immediately above the withdrawing room is the great, or guest, bed-chamber, a spacious room having an arched plaster ceiling enriched with mouldings and heraldic devices. The doorway to this has a fixed oak screen behind it, as is sometimes to be found in Elizabethan houses and those of earlier date. In the wall of the landing at the top of the staircase is another curious spy-hole, through which any one could look down to the hall below and observe all that was going on there. These spy-holes gave an uncomfortable kind of feeling that neither guest nor servant was free from observation.

The above is but a brief and, I fear, a sadly prosaic description of Lytes-Cary. Pages would be needed to describe it properly; perhaps only a poet could do it. Even then the glamour of the place, the sentiment that haunts its chambers, could not possibly be conveyed in cold print. It is a spot to

be seen, not described. Its ancient walls seem to enclose an atmosphere of the past, an intangible something that clings to them as ivy clings around a ruined abbey. Lytes-Cary is one of the most charming and interesting manor-houses I have ever seen. It is small but dignified; it is ancient but neither dark nor gloomy; it certainly ought to have its ghost, but I did not hear of one; it suggests romance, but not of the melo-dramatic type, for it has a look of pleasantness. I feel I must here make acknowledgment of the great kindness and courteousness shown to two perfect strangers by its present owner in showing them all over the ancient house, and for the time and pains he took to explain everything of interest therein. That visit to Lytes-Cary remains one of the most delightful memories of our tour.

Leaving Lytes-Cary, we took a road that led us westward and into a country as beautiful as a dream—a country upon which the sun shone down with the warmth and the brightness of a day in June. We did not trouble to consult our maps as to where we were going; it sufficed us to be on the road and in the midst of fresh and delightful scenery. Our destination we left to Fate; and Fate was kind, for she guided us to a world-forgotten spot possessing both beauty and historic interest, of which anon.

Driving on, after a time we dropped down from a breezy eminence to a low-lying, level, drowsy land of deep green meadows watered by sluggish streams, wherein for miles we met only a farmer's waggon crawling slowly along, the meeting of which but

served to accentuate the general loneliness of the prospect, a prospect that stretched far away into a mysterious distance of misty blue. Densely populated as England is, gridironed all over with railways, yet there are districts in it the very abode of loneliness, where the centuries come and go with little outward change, and the country looks much the same as it did in the days of the Stuarts, or even before their time. In some parts of the country I even fancy the population is decreasing. Pasturage has taken the place of ploughed fields, as corn-growing is no longer profitable; so less labour is required, and less labour is to be had if required, for the call of the town has been too strong for country folk to resist; the sturdy yeoman, too, is fast disappearing,—all of which bodes no good for the future of the land. A remedy for this state of affairs should be found. The backbone of the country used to be the hardy yeoman, tilling his own freehold and contentedly living thereon, son following father as the generations passed by. The tenant farmer, who comes and goes, is but a poor substitute. Only the pride of possession will nowadays, I fancy, ensure profitable farming and long abiding on one spot. Unfortunately the tendency of the times and the laws has been to improve the yeoman out of existence. Soon “to do yeoman’s service” will be a saying without meaning. I would that we could get him back again!

A certain solitary little hostel in Fenland displays the following legend on its front, “Five miles from anywhere. No hurry.” We felt miles from

anywhere, and moreover in no hurry; the drowsy spirit of the landscape had entered into us, and though we travelled by a speedy car we felt no inclination to hasten on. There is a certain pace with which you can get most pleasure out of scenery, and it varies with the country. Our pleasure was that day to loiter. But go you slowly or fast, at last you arrive somewhere, and so presently we found ourselves in the remote, orchard-embowered village of Muchelney. The tiny village gave us a pleasant welcome with its picturesque old buildings, its ancient church, and stone cross set on a triangular bit of grassy ground in the centre of the place. Everything about it looked old, excepting that the top of the cross had been at some distant time restored. Muchelney had the charm of ancientness, and in an age devoted to modernness, how great is that charm! By the way the number of stone crosses we met with in Dorset and Somerset surprised me, although all but one were imperfect or restored.

Muchelney has the look of a place forgotten, yet at one time, as we discovered, a stately abbey existed there, of which merely some small portions still remain, though sufficient to attest its former magnificence. Muchelney stands on a knoll a little elevated above the surrounding level and marshy country. Tradition asserts that the spot was selected for the foundation of a religious house because of its inaccessibility, being formerly practically an island in the midst of a vast morass, in winter a sea, approachable only by a causeway.

Opposite the cross we noticed a curious old thatched house with mullioned windows and an arched doorway with an ancient and, probably, its original oak door *in situ*; on the door was a quaint knocker of twisted and rusty iron, an interesting specimen of medieval craftsmanship, doubtless centuries old like the rest of the building (the roof apart), which was apparently of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Whilst we were looking at it an old body came out and asked us if we would care to take a glance inside. "It be a strange old place," she said; "it were once the priest's house, they tell me, but that were a long while back." We gladly accepted the invitation, in fact it was just what we desired. Good fortune seemed to follow us everywhere on the road, whatever we wished—happened! However, there was not much to see within; the chief interest of the house was without. The only thing noteworthy was a large hall—now divided into two rooms; this, I take it, was the living apartment of the priest, his sleeping chamber, and domestic offices opening out of it, as in the case of the pre-Reformation clergy-house at Alfriston in Sussex. The plan of both houses would appear to be much the same, though the former is built of stone and the latter is a half-timber structure. At one end of the building, on a shelf, are preserved a few medieval tiles that, we were informed, had been found there; these did not appear to us to be of special interest except for their antiquity, which could not be doubted.

Chatting with the pleasant-faced and pleasant-

spoken woman, she said, "If you're fond of old places you should see the abbot's house and the abbey cloisters. They're just at the other side of the church. But," she added thoughtfully, "maybe they won't show them to a stranger." "That's unfortunate," I replied, "for we should much like to see them; at any rate, there will be no harm asking if we may." Then the old body exclaimed, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll send my little girl along with you, and she'll ask them, from me, to show you over. They know us." Here again was another unexpected act of thoughtful kindness; we travelled about and saw everything we desired to see without trouble or inconvenience; more than this, we were frequently, as in this instance, told of places of interest which otherwise I doubt if we should have discovered for ourselves. Truly we took with us a good stock of civility, which costs nothing; we treated every one with this liberally, and in return the country people whom chance threw in our way proved better than any guide-book; for a guide-book—granting it tells you everything, and this is granting a very great deal, for never have I found such a production of perfection—will not help you to gain admission to places. Possibly there is an art in obtaining this, but it is a very simple one, it lies in a pleasant manner and tact. Tact, indeed, says Emerson, "is the art of all arts . . . opens castles and parlours," and Emerson knew!

But I am digressing; the good woman called her daughter, aged about twelve, if I guessed aright. "Put on a clean pinny," she said, "and take this

lady and gentleman round to Mrs. Dashes, and ask her if she would oblige me by showing them over the abbot's house and the cloisters." So after many thanks and the offer of a small coin to our guide for her services, which coin I had more trouble than usually falls to my lot to get accepted, we started forth. On the way we learnt from the little girl that her father, mother, and family were going next month to Canada, as they could get a farm of their own there for nothing. So the best and most enterprising of our rural folk go away to new lands. Perhaps it is better for them to go than to stay, but the old country is the loser, for it is the strong and energetic who emigrate, and the lazy, the unwilling, the aged, and the unenterprising who remain behind.

We soon arrived at the abbot's house, a beautiful and stately edifice, to which, unfortunately, my photograph does scant justice, though it gives some idea of the most important part of the building. I was unable to get the whole of it on my plate, as some hay-ricks were in my way. The abbot's erst lordly dwelling now does duty as a farm-house, and a very delightful and luxurious farm-house it makes ; there is no stint of room inside, and, if I mistake not, the farmer sleeps in what was the abbot's special chamber !

The walls of the house, a portion of which is embattled on the top, are weather-stained and lichen-tinted into a delightful harmony of colour, and to the right of, and behind, the house (as my photograph shows) is the ornamented wall of the



MUCHELNEY ABBEY: THE ABBOT'S HOUSE.

abbey refectory : if the rest of the abbey was as elaborately treated it must indeed have been an edifice of great beauty ; its foundations, which may still be traced, prove how extensive it was. Though of the abbey only a part of the refectory and cloisters remains, the abbot's house externally has escaped serious injury ; its buttressed walls show no signs of weakness, and look as though much history will be made before they do. Even the tracery of the windows is almost perfect, and possibly encloses some of the original glass, though this is a detail we failed to notice.

With the introduction given to us we had no difficulty in viewing the interior. When entering we noted how refreshingly cool it was, though the day was hot ; and with those thick, substantial walls—they would form an interesting study for the modern speculative builder—I would wager that the house is relatively as warm in winter as it is cool in summer. To live in it must be a delight only qualified by the odd planning, which according to modern ideas is, to say the least, somewhat inconvenient.

The interior of the house is disappointing, for it has suffered greatly from alterations to adapt it to its present purpose. The chief feature is the abbot's room with its elaborately and quaintly sculptured fireplace. An arched doorway gives access from the house to the cloisters (or rather what remains of them), which are now walled up and serve the requirement of a great storehouse. At one end is a fine Gothic window built up with the rest. If the last abbot could come to life again

and revisit his ancient abode, I wonder what his thoughts would be; perhaps it is as well for him that he sleeps in peace. He may have been a good abbot, or a bad one; of his history I know nothing, nor do I feel inclined to dip into dusty old tomes to unearth it,—“his bones are dust, his soul is with the saints, I trust.” Thus charitably would I think of him.

Stevenson sings, and for once I feel that the master sings wrongly—

There's nothing under Heav'n so blue
That's fairly worth the travelling to.

.

For wheresoe'er the highways tend,
Be sure there's nothing at the end.

We did not find it so, and otherwise why do men travel—and why are guide-books written? To come upon such a spot as Muchelney is to refute such a dictum, and Muchelney was only one of the many places of much interest our travels brought us to.

Rejoining the car, as we drove out of the village we observed, let into the wall above the doorway of a cottage, a quaint bit of carving representing a figure with a halo round his head and two books in his left hand, the right one being raised, showing the two forefingers extended in the act of blessing: manifestly a bit of sculpture preserved from the abbey.

A stretch of level land across the marshes, followed by a short and stiff ascent, brought us again on to comparatively high ground and to the

church of Huish Episcopi, its tall and stately tower being a landmark for miles around. This church is said to possess the finest tower in Somerset, a county famed for its church towers. In spite of the learned architectural authorities who take this view, I am inclined to think that we saw other church towers in Somerset equally fine, perhaps finer; though not having the advantage of such a glorious position they do not so assert themselves, and would probably fail to appeal in like manner to the casual observer, for it is not only the building, but its position that counts—the effect of the finest architecture is enhanced by its site.

A little beyond Huish Episcopi our attention was arrested by a curious sight, for our road ahead went under a wide stone arch having a chapel immediately on the top. Stopping to make inquiries, we learnt that this chapel is known as the Hanging Chapel, so called, we were further informed, because the chapel overhangs the road. Afterwards we were given another version of the origin of the quaint title, the story being that Judge Jeffreys ordered some of his unfortunate prisoners to be hanged there after Monmouth's defeat at Sedgemoor, hence the name. The arch is one of the ancient gateways that gave access to Langport through the fortified walls which formerly surrounded the town; at least that was the history of it as given to us. I know of only one other instance of a road leading thus curiously beneath a church, and that is at Warwick.

CHAPTER VI

On a market day—Hotel Visitors' Books—Across the marshes—A ruined church—"The Mump"—"The Isle of Athelney"—An evening drive—A country of dykes—Squatters—A moving fence!—The chance company at our inn—The joys of the road.

FROM the Hanging Chapel we dipped down by a steep street into the old-fashioned little town of Langport, and drove to the ancient hostelry we discovered there for refreshment. Unfortunately it chanced to be market day, and consequently the inn-yard was crowded with farmers' carts, but their owners cheerfully helped to make room for us in an odd corner; therein the farmers differed from most of their kind by smiling instead of frowning at the car. Never before have I met with such a jovial, good-natured company of agriculturists—"may their shadows never grow less"—and they were mostly of portly proportions! They even bade us a cheery good-day as we entered, though, I am afraid, we disturbed the equanimity of some of their horses.

One or two professed to admire the car, and one exclaimed to the party generally, "I bain't against motor cars when driven carefully, but I don't like the outside look of 'em." To which another replied, "But you cannot judge a horse by its harness; now

what I like about a car is she never eats her head off in the stable a-doing nothing, she only eats when she works." But we were hungry, with that keen hunger that comes from motoring far in the open air, so we left the farmers to their talk and sought the coffee-room. We fared well off cold roast beef, nut-brown ale, clear and cool, with sweets and Cheddar cheese to follow. Good old-fashioned English fare enjoyed in a good old-fashioned English inn—and what could be better?

Our repast finished, my eyes chanced upon a Visitors' Book placed on a side table, and as one sometimes finds interesting and amusing entries therein, I ventured to examine it. I know not how it is, but when I first began my driving tours,—many long years ago, alas!—I frequently discovered curious epitaphs in country churchyards, now my search for such is generally in vain; so with Visitors' Books, I formerly got much entertainment out of them, now, as a rule, I scrutinise their pages with small or no reward. Is the sense of humour decreasing, or is it that we are busier than our forefathers and cannot find time for such trifling? However, in this book I discovered one or two things that may bear quoting, and though fresh to me, they may or may not be original, for travellers often borrow their verses and comments from others. The first we copied runs thus:—

We want to write something original,
We don't know where to begin,
For there's nothing original in us
Excepting—original sin.

The next is as follows :—

I came here for change and rest,
The landlord took the change,
And the waiter took the rest.

Another extract is of no value, but I give it as it shows how our transatlantic cousins appreciate the homely fare and comforts of the unpretentious English inn, and shows also, incidentally, how such travellers penetrate into the remote nooks and corners of "The Old Home," as they delight to call this old England of ours. Verily I believe no one appreciates its beauties more, or is prouder of its past history, than the genuine American whose ancestors came from its shores, nor have I ever met pleasanter company on the road than the cultured American. And writing this calls to mind the following lines written by Lowell, and inscribed on a commemorative window to Sir Walter Raleigh in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster—the window being given by Americans :—

The New World's sons, from England's breast we drew
Such milk as bids remember whence we came :
Proud of her past, wherefrom our future grew,
This window we inscribe with Raleigh's name.

But I have wandered from the Visitors' Book ; this is the extract I made :—

It is a far cry from here to Austin, Texas, but the trip is worth the while to get such a luncheon as we had to-day.—July 31st, 1907.

Would any one write like that of a luncheon pro-

vided by the best modern hotel anywhere? The delight is not simply in the meal, however good that may be, but in the surroundings, the romance, the poetical atmosphere, and the old associations of the ancient and homely inn. The modern hotel may be magnificent, but it cannot command these things. Even Stevenson felt their influence and subtle charm, for he confessed that he could never get over his hankering after a room in a wayside hostelry in which the action of his tale might start. Other romantic writers have made much the same confession, so the charm must be actual and widely felt. The American from far Texas was not singular in his sentiments.

Whilst on the subject of Visitors' Books I am tempted to reproduce here a few effusions extracted therefrom. These I dotted down at various times and places in my note-books; at least they will serve to show the quality and sweet sense of humour of some of the best of these productions. The following is from the north country; the writer evidently was greatly displeased with his bill, though why the landlord should have allowed the verse to remain in his Visitors' Book I cannot imagine, but I have frequently found such unfavourable criticisms left therein :—

The Crown is painted on the board
This inn hangs out as sign,
And only monarchs could afford
To stay here or to dine.

The next comes from Scotland, and differently expresses the same sentiment :—

Mine host of mine inn is a very small man,
For a soldier he'd need to be larger,
But if war should break out, he'll do what he can ;
He'd make a magnificent charger.

The below is from a hotel that is a favourite resort of honeymooners, though, strangely enough, I stayed there a fortnight without observing any :—

The reason why I'm going away
I leave in writing, so that they
Who've made my life a burden here
May know why I shan't re-appear.

There's not a room in all this place
Which couples, newly wed, don't grace.
I wander here, I wander there,
But find them spooning everywhere.

Sometimes they blush, mostly they glare,
But all regard me as a bear.
I am a bashful man, and so,
Since I can't hide myself, I go.

Another was related to me by a friend who was asked to "write something" in the Visitors' Book of a certain hotel where neither the fare, the accommodation, nor the charges pleased him. He did write "something," and this is what it was :—

Quoth the raven —— !

Before Visitors' Books were the fashion certain witty men made use of the hotel window panes whereon to scrawl their remarks. An often-quoted example of these is the couplet that Dean Swift scratched with a diamond on the window of his room at the Three Crosses (an old inn that

formerly stood at Willoughby on the Holyhead road), and this is how he vented his feelings :—

There are three crosses at your door ;
Hang up your wife, and you'll count four.

Upon reading this the landlord is said to have changed his sign to the Four Crosses, by which sign the inn was certainly known in the coaching days. Another version has it that the inn was always known as the Four Crosses, and that what the witty Dean wrote was—

Fool, to put up four crosses at your door ;
Put up your wife, she's crosser than all four.

It seems to me probable that the latter is the correct reading, as I can imagine that the landlord would have had a sorry time of it had he really changed the sign of his inn on account of the former.

To conclude this attractive subject, I must find room for still another poetic effusion said to have been written, many years ago, by a local parson on the window pane of an old roadside hostelry near Northallerton. This then is it :—

Here in my wicker chair I sit,
Far from folly, and far from wit,
Content to live, devoid of care,
With country folks and country fare ;
To listen to my landlord's tale,
And drink his health in good old ale,
Then smoke and read the *York Courant* ;
I'm happy, and 'tis all I want,
Though few my tithes, and light my purse,
I thank my God it is no worse.

We found nothing of special interest to detain us in Langport, though it is a pleasing example of a quiet little country town, where nothing special ever happens—and the only mild excitement it experiences is the gathering there of the surrounding farmers on a market day—

Whose corn and cattle are their only care,
And their supreme delight, a country fair.

So once more we set forth on our pleasant pilgrimage, bound eventually for Bridgwater, where we proposed to spend the night. During our stop at Langport we had taken the opportunity of consulting our map, and had planned to visit the Isle of Athelney on our way, in order to see the historic spot to which King Alfred retired and hid himself awhile after the Danes had taken possession of his kingdom.

We experienced some trouble in reaching Athelney—a good deal in fact—for the signposts failed to direct us thither, and though we endeavoured to steer by our map, we somehow missed the direct way, if any way could be called direct where all were devious. Passing through Aller, a small hamlet of historic interest, as it was there that Alfred baptized Guthrum, the Danish leader (after having defeated, captured, and converted him to Christianity), we presently found ourselves at Othery, a wan-looking village with a fine weather-worn church keeping watch and ward over it. The church looked interesting, but Athelney was still some way off and the shadows were lengthening,

so we did not stop to inspect it, lest possibly we should be benighted amongst the dreary marshes with their wide dykes on either side of the open road, conveniently at hand to drive into.

The marshes about here, locally called moors, though why I fail to understand, are oftentimes under water as well as the roads, which are but slightly elevated above their level, so that driving in the winter-time is not infrequently accompanied by a mishap. My newspaper this morning contains particulars of two such occurrences in this very locality—and one to a bishop! These I venture to reproduce, as they show that the Somerset marsh roads are not always free from danger. The first paragraph runs thus:—"Floods have occurred in West Somerset, near Bridgwater. A man named Morris was driving a pony and cart along a flooded roadway, when the animal slipped into deep water. Morris was thrown out, and both man and pony were drowned." The next paragraph relates to the bishop. "The Bishop of Bath and Wells had an exciting adventure in the flooded marsh district of Somersetshire recently. He was motoring from Wells to Taunton, when his car ran into deep water near Othery. The car went so far that it could move neither backward nor forward, but an obliging rustic brought a horse, with which he dragged the bishop and his car out. 'This is a triumph for the horse,' observed his lordship, who eventually reached his destination in safety." In the former case the supposed intelligence of the animal did not prevent a disaster, and possibly the

bishop escaped a similar fate because his unintelligent motor car refused to move any farther. A series of posts should be erected on either side of such highways to show the direction of the road when the land is flooded, especially where such floods are not uncommon. A local man said to me he supposed nothing would be done till a lord or a bishop had been drowned—I really think the bishop's misadventure might count without waiting longer, to say nothing of a mere man and a pony being actually drowned. It was not the man's fault that he was not a bishop!

At Othery we condescended to ask our way; we were told to turn to the left and keep straight on—"you cannot miss the road"; this was consoling after having missed it so successfully. Presently a ruined church, standing solitary and right on the top of an isolated tor, came into view, and this proved to be Boroughbridge, though the natives around call it the "Mump," and will have none of Boroughbridge. Why they call it the "Mump" we could not make out, but had to be content with the explanation of a native that "we allus call it the Mump, and allus shall." Though he might answer for the past, how he could answer for the future I cannot say. "It were called the Mump long afore it were called Boroughbridge, and we don't want any new-fangled notions down here," he continued. We replied we were glad to hear that. "Do you know anything about the history of the place?" we asked. The man looked up at us and replied, "He was not learned on history—it's quite enough to

earn a living without bothering about such stuff. They taught it I at school, but I soon found it were no good to make a living with, so I dropped it. History bain't no good to a poor man, I say, it don't get him food nor do it pay his rent. How to get a living is just what they don't teach one at school with all their teaching." After which little lecture he departed, leaving us to ponder over what he said. The wayside gossip and unexpected incidents of the road are not the least entertaining features of a driving tour.

The church-crowned knoll of Boroughbridge rises out of the long level stretch of green marshes like an island rises out of the sea, and when the marshes are flooded it must become a veritable one. That it has been formerly fortified is manifest by the grass-grown entrenchments that cover it. That its church is ruined may be explained by the fact that during the Civil War the hill and church were garrisoned for the King, and besieged and captured by Colonel Okey for the Parliamentarians. Probably it has more ancient history, but at the moment I am not inclined to search it out. Being in sight of and within two miles of the Isle of Athelney, Alfred's stronghold, it may well have figured in his fierce struggle with the Danes; the hill, besides being as isolated, is steeper than that of Athelney, and therefore more readily defensible. Certainly it has been deeply entrenched all round, whilst Athelney to-day is smooth of surface without a trace of any such thing, not even a shadow on the grass reveals any artificial unevenness, except

perhaps at a small space on its summit, which is far too limited for the purpose of a fortification of any kind.

Just beyond Boroughbridge we came to the river Parrot, which we crossed. By the side of the river stood a little country inn; now it happened that our petrol was running low, so, as it is quite a common thing for wayside inns nowadays to supply that needful article, we stopped and asked if they had any for sale. The young woman we saw looked quite mystified, and after a moment's pause exclaimed wonderingly, "Petrol! I don't know what it is, I never heard the name before." This reply astonished us as far as we allowed anything to astonish us on the road where the unexpected is always happening, and, perhaps, will serve to show what an out-of-the-world spot we were in. On another journey, in a remote part of the country, an old body of eighty-five made a statement that still more astonished us, to the effect that she had never been in a railway train, but that, when a girl, she had seen the body of a murderer hanging on a gibbet, and she related how the poor mother of the criminal used to go to the spot every evening to pick up any bones that might have fallen during the day, in order to give them decent burial! But those were the good old days!

A straight stretch of road, of a mile or more, right across the marshes brought us to the "Isle of Athelney," now no longer "lonely," for there are a few scattered, though humble, dwellings near it, and a rambling old farmstead at the foot of the

“island” itself. A cart-track leads from the main road to the historic hill; the hill is topped by a monument that stands out sharply silhouetted against the wide, over-arching sky, so that the stranger could hardly pass Athelney unnoticed by,—not that the isolated knoll, rising so abruptly out of the great level plain, needs any monument to attract attention to it, but the monument suggests that something eventful has happened there. Though even a stately monument is not to be trusted to lead the inquiring traveller to a spot where history has been made, or where an important event has taken place. Once I pulled up on the roadside, and from thence tramped some distance over ploughed fields, made my way through several thick thorn hedges—tearing my clothes in so doing—then climbed a stiff hill (all beneath a broiling sun), in order to reach a tall stone obelisk that I had espied on its summit. I expected to come upon history, or to set my foot on a battlefield, but found that, after all my exertion, I was merely standing by the side of the burial-place of a favourite hunter who had died on the spot during a famous run with the hounds! Now I am not so keen in taking long and toilsome excursions after distant monuments.

But to return to Athelney. Close to the river there (I took it for a wider dyke than usual, running straight between its banked sides as it did, but they called it the river Tone) stands the primitive little “Cottage Inn.” According to local tradition, which if you dare to discredit the natives look down upon you as something worse than a heathen, this

tiny inn occupies the very site of the neatherd's cottage in which Alfred sought shelter, and where, when lost in thought, he allowed the cakes he had been asked to watch to burn on the hearth. "And that's why it's called the Cottage Inn," we were told. Some hard-hearted antiquaries, who ought to know better, have thrown a doubt upon the cake-burning incident, but it makes a pleasant tradition; inherently it is not improbable, and, in spite of their learning, I defy the erudite antiquaries to prove the story untrue. Such ancient traditions cannot now be authenticated, but they have been handed down from generation to generation, and believed in as "gospel true" by the country folk. Even accepted history has a leaven of legend mixed up with it, in so far as some of it was written down from information gathered by word of mouth long after the events described had taken place. A good deal of history in print has its foundation in tradition.

A sluggish dyke prevented our access to Athelney hill except by a footbridge that led into a farm-yard, where the pigs loudly grunted their disapproval at being disturbed by strangers. Mounting the hill we came to the monument, which we found inscribed as follows :—

King Alfred the Great
In the year of our Lord 879,
Having been defeated by
The Danes, fled for refuge
To the Forest of Athelney,
Where he lay concealed
From his enemies for the
Space of a whole year.

He soon afterwards regained
Possession of his Throne
And in grateful remembrance
Of the protection he had
Received under the favour
Of Heaven, Erected a
Monastery on this spot, and
Endowed it with all the
Isle of Athelney.

I do not know what is meant by "the Forest of Athelney," for I cannot imagine that any trees could have ever grown on "the vast and impassable morass" or the watery wastes that in Alfred's day surrounded Athelney. I rather fancy that the medieval chroniclers gave the term forest to any extensive tract of waste land whether covered with trees or not, as, for instance, the "Forest of Dartmoor." Wise, in his work on the New Forest, remarks—"The word 'forest' is here used, as it is always throughout the district, in its primitive sense of a wild, open space. And moors and plains are still so called, though there may not be a single tree growing upon them."

From the summit of the hill is a wide and rather dreary view over the vast and melancholy marshes, their monotony of green being only broken by the innumerable dykes of leaden hue that thread their sluggish course amongst them—a space-expressing prospect stretching far away till lost that day in a misty blue on the circling horizon—half sky, half land. A great silence reigned around, for from the marshes arose no sound, the whispering wind had dropped, the twilight was coming on apace, there

was no sign of life or movement anywhere; the dreariness of the spot depressed us, the silence seemed almost uncanny, the cheerful every-day world so far away. There may be beauty in the prospect, but it needs an eye attuned to such strange beauty to appreciate it—possibly it might appeal to an anchorite! Perhaps we did not see Athelney to advantage under the grey gloom of the gathering twilight: the air from the marshes rose damp and chill, a raw mist was creeping over them—the prospect was impressive, but not inspiring. Of the monastery Alfred erected there no vestige remains.

Then we remounted the car. The hum of the engines sounded like music to us amidst the profound silence of the marshes; it suggested life and movement—movement that would bring us again in touch with despised humanity and, we trusted, to a cosy and comfortable inn. Then Shenstone's much-quoted lines came to mind, and we realised the importance of the inn to the traveller, for without an inn how could he conveniently travel?

Here and there on the banks that bound the dykes in this country, where the banks are sufficiently wide on the top and come between the water and the road, you may observe little cottages, of primitive but picturesque construction, carefully surrounded by a fence. These, we understood, were all the tiny freeholds of the men who lived in them, and that they had been, in the first place, obtained by their forefathers, who had squatted on what was "nobody's land," and so in time had

secured a holding there. In the past it appears that little or no notice was taken of such doings; the land was of scant value—no one claimed it, not even the State. But the amusing part, as related to us, was how, once firmly established in possession of a plot of ground duly fenced in, the plot grew almost imperceptibly but certainly in size. And this is how it happened: The cottagers allowed, perhaps I should say encouraged, their fences to lean a little over (as an old fence is apt to do), to the extent of perhaps two feet, but always *away* from their enclosure; in due course, at a convenient time, they would quietly and quickly repair the fence and set it up straight again, only they set it straight from the projecting top, and so secured a slight addition of ground all along the line of the fence. By repeating this process at favourable intervals during succeeding years, they gradually and considerably enlarged their holdings. The fences moved outwards slowly but surely. I have never heard of moving fences before, but you learn many things on the road!

We now set forth in search of Bridgwater. Our map showed only narrow lanes as leading thither, and winding as well as narrow lanes they proved. Along these we proceeded, steering our course as well as we could towards a point where we imagined Bridgwater should be. I doubt whether we went the best or nearest way. Eventually, however, to our relief, we escaped on to a wide highroad from the dreary marshes and the damp, depressing mists that hung over them; then speeding on, the cheerful

lights of Bridgwater came into sight, and soon afterwards we reached the town, where we found comfortable quarters for ourselves as well as our car, besides a warm welcome that came as a fitting ending to our long day's journey.

In the coffee-room of our inn we met four fellow-wayfarers—two motorists and two cyclists—who chatted pleasantly and entertainingly about their travels, the cyclists being much interested in the remains of some lake dwellings discovered recently near Glastonbury. They did their best to persuade us to visit them, but to make the detours necessary to see every place we were told about on the road would have meant prolonging our outing until the winter. You cannot truly choose your company at your inn—that is a matter of chance—but in this respect we were fortunate, for we generally found some one to chat with and whose talk was worth listening to. It is a poor company in which you can find no entertainment, or out of which you can extract no information. Personally I can say much more than that, for never yet have I taken a long driving tour but I have made thereon a lasting friend, and none of the joys of the road are greater than this.

CHAPTER VII

Admiral Blake's birthplace—A picture with a strange history—Gazeboes—Coleridge's cottage at Nether Stowey—Stories of Somerset smugglers—The Quantock country—How "The Ancient Mariner" came to be written—An eventful walk—A poet's blunder—A neglected corner of England.

BRIDGWATER has the reputation of being an ugly commercial town of no interest whatever to the tourist. Commercial it is, and no one could honestly accuse it of being beautiful, but we found it interesting apart from its harbour and shipping, for shipping always has attractions. Opposite to our inn, on a wide space where three roads meet, I noticed a statue of Admiral Blake boldly executed in bronze, one of the very few statues I have ever been able to bring myself to admire, for it is simple, restrained, and effective—an ornament to a town whose ornaments are few. Now Blake, "Bold, brave Blake," was a Bridgwater man, and the Bridgwater people are proud of him, as well they may be. "We want more men of his sort," exclaimed an inhabitant to me as I was looking up at the figure; "he were born and bred here. Maybe you're a stranger, and if you would like I will take and show you the very

house in which he were born. A real Somerset man he were, as good as they make 'em"; then proudly he added, "I be Somerset too." There exists a good deal of local pride in these old provincial and essentially English towns, as a traveller may discover who takes the trouble to chat leisurely with some of their townfolk.

Now, unfortunately, so suspicious is human nature, I imagined that the man had offered himself as a guide to Blake's birthplace in order to secure a tip. Let me here confess that, to my surprise, he positively declined to receive anything of the kind. "I be only too proud," he said, "to show you the house where Blake were born. When I saw you a-looking at his statue, I thoughts as how you were a stranger and might like to see it." Now the man was poorly clad, and owned he had to work hard to keep his wife and child; but though I put it as nicely as I could, he declined to receive a sixpence to get his little one a present. His manner was respectful, but decided, so I was reluctantly forced to accept his services gratuitously. It is very unusual for me to have such trouble in endeavouring to dispense with my money, but this is by no means the only occasion of the kind. There are some poor men in England with a soul above receiving tips even for services rendered, but you do not find them amongst porters at railway stations or waiters at hotels. I would one did!

Blake's birthplace proved to be situated in a narrow street, and, like many houses in which famous men have been born, unpretentious and of no archi-

tectural merit; for the man glorifies the house, and not the house the man. It is a long, low building of two storeys, with yellow-washed walls, a red ridge-tiled roof, and a porch top supported by wrought-iron brackets—a building without any special character, one that a visitor would probably pass unheeded by unless his eye caught sight of the label on its front inscribed—

In this House
Was Born • A.D. • 1598.
Robert Blake
ADMIRAL
And General at Sea.

But to return to the statue of Blake. On the side of the pedestal supporting this is a bold and spirited relief in bronze of old-time fighting ships entering a port, and below an inscription runs—

Admiral Blake's Body brought to
Plymouth Sound in the St. George
August 7th, 1657.

Sleep after toyle, Port after stormy seas,
Ease after war, Death after life, doth greatly please.

Blake was buried in Westminster Abbey.

But for his fame the world itself
Hath not sufficient room

was finely written in his epitaph. Blake died poor. "My business," as he put it, "is to keep the enemy from fooling us, not to make money." And he attended to his "business" triumphantly!—a worthy

successor to those gallant sea-dogs of Devon who "neither Don nor Devil feared"!

Next we were attracted to the large church that stands in the centre of the town. This possesses a tall and graceful spire, a somewhat unusual feature in a county where churches nearly all have towers. Within the church, over the communion table, is a fine painting of the Descent from the Cross—a painting with a genuine old-master look about it, and one that strikes the artistic observer as a picture of no ordinary merit. Many notable artists have been to inspect this work of art. Their names were given to me, but I cannot now remember them with any certainty. Amongst the number, Sir Joshua Reynolds is said to have made several special visits to study it, and to have attributed the work to Murillo.

In the picture the feet of the Virgin are represented as covered, which points strongly to the probability of a Spanish origin, as the Inquisition considered it an insult to the Deity to represent the Virgin with bare feet; such, at least, a Somerset parson informed us, was the opinion of his bishop.

Now, this picture has a singular history, and, I was given to understand, a history that is perfectly authentic—one which curiously resembles the tradition of the famous Fairford windows in Gloucestershire. The picture is said to have been taken from a Spanish privateer that was captured by a British man-of-war. After that it got into the possession of the Hon. Anne Poulett, at the time M.P. for Bridgwater, who presented it to the church. I

thought, in my innocence, when I heard the Christian name, that my informant had made a slip in mentioning it, but he explained that the name was correct, it being given to the Hon. A. Poulett after his godmother Queen Anne. Still it sounds odd for a man to bear a woman's Christian name!

There was one thing that greatly pleased us in Bridgwater, though it was only a small matter. In the very centre of the town, besides in other parts, large signposts are erected, plainly lettered, that point the various ways out of it: "To Bristol and Bath," "To Taunton," "To Stowey and Minehead," and so forth. Now the convenience of this to the traveller is very great; for though it is a simple matter to drive into a town, it is by no means so simple for a stranger to get out of one of any size in the direction he wishes, at any rate not without much annoying stopping and asking the way.

We left Bridgwater bound for Nether Stowey, the Quantock country, and beyond, but where that beyond might be did not trouble us. Why should it? We were simply touring for the pleasure of touring, not to reach anywhere in particular, so that our destination was a trivial detail left to take care of itself. The sky above, that morning, was clear and blue; a soft west wind was blowing—a more perfect day there could not have been, even had we the making of it. And the weather suited the scenery, which requires sunshine to do full justice to its charms of hill and

dale, of wood and river, and blue peeps of the land-bound sea.

At first our road was uninteresting ; moreover, it was unpleasantly dusty, but the scenery improved with every mile we progressed, and the dust—the only fly in our ointment—grew less, till it ceased to trouble us at all. Entering Nether Stowey, at the end of a long garden wall we came upon one of those old-fashioned gazeboes that are now so rarely met with, but which formerly were such frequent and familiar features of the road. At these wayside summer-houses our forefathers, or at least their wives and friends, used to repair in order to watch the coaches, post-chaises, and other traffic of the road go by, which mild excitement in a less exacting age sufficed to while away a dull hour or two, with tea and other refreshments to help. As gazeboes are gradually disappearing, we stopped to photograph this rather fine example of one ; some day there may be none left to photograph ; indeed, during this journey we only saw two. I believe that in the old days those gathered in the gazeboes used to set their watches by the mail-coaches as they passed, which speaks well for the punctuality of the mails if not of the time-keeping of the watches !

Another disappearing and less pleasing relic of the past, that may still be occasionally observed when travelling across country, is the watch-houses that were erected in many churchyards overlooking the graves therein to prevent their desecration by body-snatchers. A gruesome reminder of “the



GAZEBO, NETHER STOWEY.

good old days" and of doing that have almost passed from memory. One comes unexpectedly upon many such, almost forgotten, things when on a driving tour, such as whipping-posts, scolds' chairs and bridles, etc.

Frankly, Nether Stowey disappointed us: truly the country around is beautiful enough to satisfy the most exacting critic of the beautiful, but the village itself is plain, without any suspicion of picturesqueness or distinction; it is, however, clean, homely, and sweet. Possibly we expected too much of Nether Stowey, hence our disappointment for a spot having such rich literary associations seems to demand some grace; thither Coleridge came, and there he wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and other poems—Wordsworth following Coleridge as a resident in the neighbourhood.

The cottage in which Coleridge lived stands at the further end of the village on the way to Minehead, it being the last house to the left. "My own lonely cottage, where my babe and my babe's mother dwell in peace," wrote Coleridge. It is to-day a simple, uninteresting structure facing directly on the village street without any garden coming between; it is of two stories with a rough-cast front and a red-tiled roof; no roses, creepers, or ivy clamber over it as they should over a poet's dwelling. There is nothing romantic to the eye about the cottage; in its literary associations lies its sole charm. The historic house, we learnt, had been purchased by a committee of gentlemen in

order to preserve it from being altered, converted into other uses, pulled down, or falling into decay; and truly the roof under which two such rare gems of English literature were composed as "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" deserves to be honoured and preserved for its memories—for memories are things you cannot buy! Coleridge's cottage, in his "beloved Stowey" (for his friends there, and the romantic country around, made Stowey "beloved" by the poet), is something more than mere stones and mortar, it is a hallowed spot. On the front of the house a label has been attached with the following brief but sufficient legend:—

Here
Samuel Taylor
Coleridge
Made his home,
1797-1800.

Coleridge arrived at Nether Stowey in the winter of 1796, he being then twenty-three years old, and agreed to rent the cottage for £7 a year, though whether he really ever paid any rent for it appears questionable; no doubt he intended to do so, if some one had not insisted on paying it for him, that he might work free from anxiety on that point, for, as a Scotchman has expressed it, "poetry is a gey ill thing to live with unless ye hev a fixt income." Possibly Poole, who apparently paid the rent, considered that the poet's company was an ample return for it. These and further particulars to follow of Coleridge's life at Nether Stowey I gleaned from much and interesting book search.

The poet came to this remote Somerset village, I discovered, to be near his friend Thomas Poole, and to have the use of his "book-room," as Poole quaintly termed his excellent library. Now Poole was a prosperous tanner and a cultivated man, much esteemed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him, one ever ready to give a helping hand to those in need:

Just before coming to live at Nether Stowey Coleridge thus expressed himself, "I shall have six companions—my Sara, my babe, my own shaping and disquisitive mind, my books, my beloved Tom Poole, and, lastly, Nature looking at me with a thousand looks of beauty, and speaking to me in a thousand melodies of love." After the poet and his family had been a short time there we find him writing to a friend: "We are all—wife, bantling, and self—remarkably well. Mrs. Coleridge loves Stowey and loves Thomas Poole and his mother, who live here. Our house is better than we expected—we have a pretty garden. Communication has been made from our orchard into T. Poole's garden, and from thence to Cruikshank's, a friend of mine, and a young married man whose wife is very amiable. . . . And from all this you will conclude we are very happy."

Comfortably settled in their new home, Coleridge induced Wordsworth and his sister to visit them there, as appears by a letter he wrote to Southey, dated July 1797, wherein he says: "I have been on a visit to the Wordsworths . . . I brought him and his sister back with me, and here I have settled

them! By a combination of curious circumstances a gentleman's seat, with park and woods, elegantly and completely furnished, with nine lodging rooms, three parlours, and a hall, in the most beautiful and romantic situation by the seaside, four miles from Stowey, was to let. This we have got for Wordsworth at the rent of twenty-three pounds a year, taxes included! The parks and woods are his for all purposes he wants them, and the large gardens are altogether and entirely his." So between them the poets were comfortably housed in the lovely Quantock country for the small sum of thirty pounds a year, which seems astonishing, and long might they have remained there had it not been for the unfortunate appearance of the Republican Thelwall upon the scene, with the result that Wordsworth was forced to leave, of which anon.

As to the finding of this house, called Alfoxton, there appears some discrepancy between the accounts of Coleridge and Dorothy Wordsworth, for the latter wrote of their visit, "William and I had scrambled as far as this house, but without any more fixed thoughts upon it than some dreams of happiness in a little cottage, and passing wishes that such a place might be found. We spent a fortnight at Coleridge's; in the course of that time we heard that this house was to let, applied for it, and took it. Our principal inducement was Coleridge's society."

After this Southey, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, De Quincey, and other lesser literary lights,

were brought to Nether Stowey by Coleridge's invitation, and all but the city-loving Lamb appear to have been delighted with their visits. Wordsworth was charmed with his quarters at Alfoxton and the scenery around, and wrote many of his poems there, including "We are Seven," "The Idiot Boy," "Peter Bell," etc. Southey appears also to have been delighted with the country, for he remarked that "Devonshire itself falls flat after the north of Somerset."

William Hazlitt thus describes a long tramp he took with Coleridge, during his visit to him:—
"We walked for miles and miles on dark brown heaths overlooking the Severn sea, with the Welsh hills beyond . . . from one spot I pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre-ship in 'The Ancient Mariner' At times we descended into little sheltered valleys by the seaside, with a smuggler's face scowling at us."

The Somerset smuggler was in his glory then, if we may believe the stories of him that have been handed down to us; salt truly is cheap, but still, possibly, there is a substratum of fact in some of these legends, for did not the Rev. R. S. Hawker, the famous vicar of Morwenstow, not so very far away, relate how one of his congregation, a smuggler, exclaimed to him, "There had been divers parsons there in his time, some very learned parsons too, and some very strict; and some would preach one

doctrine and some another ; and there was one who held very mean notions about running goods, and said 'twas a wrong thing to do ; but even he, and the rest, never took part with the gauger—never !” And Hawker is a credible authority to quote. Then there is a story told of a Somerset parson who was quietly informed by his clerk one Sunday morning that there could be no service that day “for the church is full of kegs !” A Somerset woman told one of Coleridge’s guests that she had seven sons, and had brought them all up to be smugglers. The sin, the smuggler folk declared, was not theirs, but the King’s, because he taxed good liquor, and that was not a just thing to do !

Charles Lamb, alone of the Nether Stowey visitors, as might be expected of him, found life in the quiet Quantocks dull and insipid ; he seems even to have grown a little weary of Coleridge’s “incessant chatter,” though others delighted in it. Coleridge sometimes preached in the Unitarian Chapel at Taunton, and during a long dissertation of Coleridge’s, to which Lamb was perforce a tired listener, the poet suddenly exclaimed, “Have you ever heard me preach ?” “I have never heard you do anything else,” replied Lamb. After the departure of Lamb, Coleridge wrote some verses about him in which the following lines occurred :—

My gentle-hearted Charles ! thou who hast pin’d
And hungered after Nature many a year,
In the great City pent . . .

Lamb, who never in his life “hungered after

Nature," but always the town, resented these lines; indeed, had he not already forcibly expressed his detestation of the country thus, "Let not the lying poet be believed, who entice men from the cheerful streets. What does one gain by health in the country? Intolerable dulness. What by early hours and moderate meals? A total blank. . . . Let no Londoner imagine health and rest, innocent occupation, interchange of converse, sweet and recreative study, can make the country anything better than altogether odious and detestable. A garden was the primitive prison, till man, with Promethean felicity and boldness, luckily sinned himself out of it." Perhaps, after all, it is not greatly to be wondered at that "gentle-hearted" Charles failed to appreciate his sojourn in North Somerset to the extent that Coleridge desired of him.

Just when the two poets seemed settled for good in the Quantocks, John Thelwall appeared on the scene, who, Coleridge declared, was "an honest man with the additional rare distinction of having nearly been hanged." Thelwall had only recently been tried and acquitted for high treason. During the trial he remarked to Lord Erskine, who defended him, "Perhaps it would be best if I pleaded my own cause?" To this Erskine replied, "If you do, you'll be hanged." Whereupon Thelwall responded, "Then I'll be hanged if I do."

After the trial the Government employed a spy, a man with a long nose, to watch Thelwall's move-

ments; accordingly the spy followed Thelwall to Nether Stowey, which proceeding drew suspicions on Coleridge and his friends. At the time it chanced that the poets on their rambles frequently discussed the theories of the philosopher Spinoza, and the spy, who overheard some of their conversation, concluded that they referred to him as the spy with the long nose. The Government agent became suspicious of the poets owing to the long lonely walks they took together, whereupon he imagined they were plotting treason, and reported unfavourably of their doings, the upshot of which was that the matter got to the ears of the Alfoxton agent, who refused to allow Wordsworth to stay on there after his first year expired. So Wordsworth had reluctantly to leave, then Coleridge left also, and the literary gatherings at Nether Stowey came to an end. Thus the Lakes gained by Quantock's loss. Had it not been for the spy's arrival in the locality, probably Wordsworth would have been altogether associated with North Somerset, and the present-day pilgrims to Rydal Mount would be making their pilgrimages to Alfoxton. So often Fate decrees that from slight causes great events should follow.

It is well worth while to visit Nether Stowey—though you journey from the farthest end of the kingdom to reach it—if only in order to take the delightful walk from there over the Quantocks, in view of the Severn Sea, that Coleridge with Wordsworth and his sister took, where the poem of “The Ancient Mariner” was planned and discussed. The

story was suggested to Coleridge by a dream of his friend Cruikshank; Wordsworth approved the scheme, and suggested the introduction of the incident of shooting the albatross, having just read in some work that sailors considered it a crime to kill that bird of good omen to them. Wordsworth alludes thus to this historic walk in his Prelude:—

That summer, under whose indulgent skies
Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roved,
Unchecked, or loitered 'mid her sylvan courts,
Thou in bewitching words, with happy heart,
Didst chant the vision of that Ancient Man,
The bright-eyed Mariner. . . .

Wordsworth delighted in these long rambles; they inspired him, for "If a man would be a poet he must walk," he said.

In my edition of "The Ancient Mariner," published by the Art Union of London, I find a footnote to the first verse of Part the Fourth, in which Coleridge says, "For the last two lines of this stanza I am indebted to Mr. Wordsworth. It was on a delightful walk from Nether Stowey to Dulverton, with him and his sister, in the autumn of 1797, that this poem was planned and in part composed."

It may not be out of place here to give the weird stanza that originally formed part of the poem, but which Coleridge afterwards struck out. It came in Part the Third, immediately following the line

Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

This, then, is the omitted stanza, for which I am indebted to a friend :—

A gust of wind starts up behind,
And whistles thro' his bones,
Thro' the holes of his eyes and the hole of his mouth
Half whistles and half groans.

The happiest days of Coleridge's life were spent at Nether Stowey with his friends ; there he wrote his two masterpieces, besides the glorious fragments of "Kubla Khan"—the "caverns measureless to man" of the last were possibly suggested by either the Mendip or the Cheddar caverns he had visited. After leaving his "beloved Stowey" Coleridge's troubles began, and one day in a fit of depression he wrote his own touching epitaph. I give the version of this that appears in Dawson's *The Makers of Modern English* :—

Stop, Christian passer-by ; stop, child of God,
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod
A poet lies, or that which once seemed he.
O lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C.,
That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death,
Mercy for praise,—to be forgiven for fame,—
He asked and hoped through Christ. Do thou the same.

By the way, a number of notable people have written their own epitaphs, and even some of the clergy have done so, and, as an antidote to the sadly pathetic one of Coleridge's, I feel tempted to quote another written for himself by Dr. David Lloyd, one of the deans of St. Asaph, which strikes quite a different note :—

This is the epitaph
Of the Dean of St. Asaph,
Who, by keeping a table
Better than he was able,
Ran much into debt,
Which is not paid yet.

Neither death nor debt seems seriously to have troubled the Dean, who, by the way, died in 1663.

Coleridge makes a curious astronomical blunder in his "Ancient Mariner," though one that possibly few would notice. It occurs in Part the Third, where he says—

The hornèd moon with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

Now, of course, it is an impossibility for a star to shine within the horns, as it would be shining through the solid, though unilluminated, body of the moon. Wordsworth would hardly have fallen into such an error, for he was a keen observer of Nature and natural phenomena. Coleridge, imaginative Coleridge, treated Nature more as a background to his actors than as of a thing to be sung about. The two poets, indeed, had agreed to collaborate in composing a long poem somewhat after the lines of "The Ancient Mariner," but treating of the wanderings of Cain, a subject that appealed to Coleridge's imaginative mind; Coleridge was to deal with the characters and Wordsworth with the scenery. Although a rough outline of the proposed poem was drafted, the project, alas, fell through, owing to Wordsworth being obliged to leave Alfoxton.

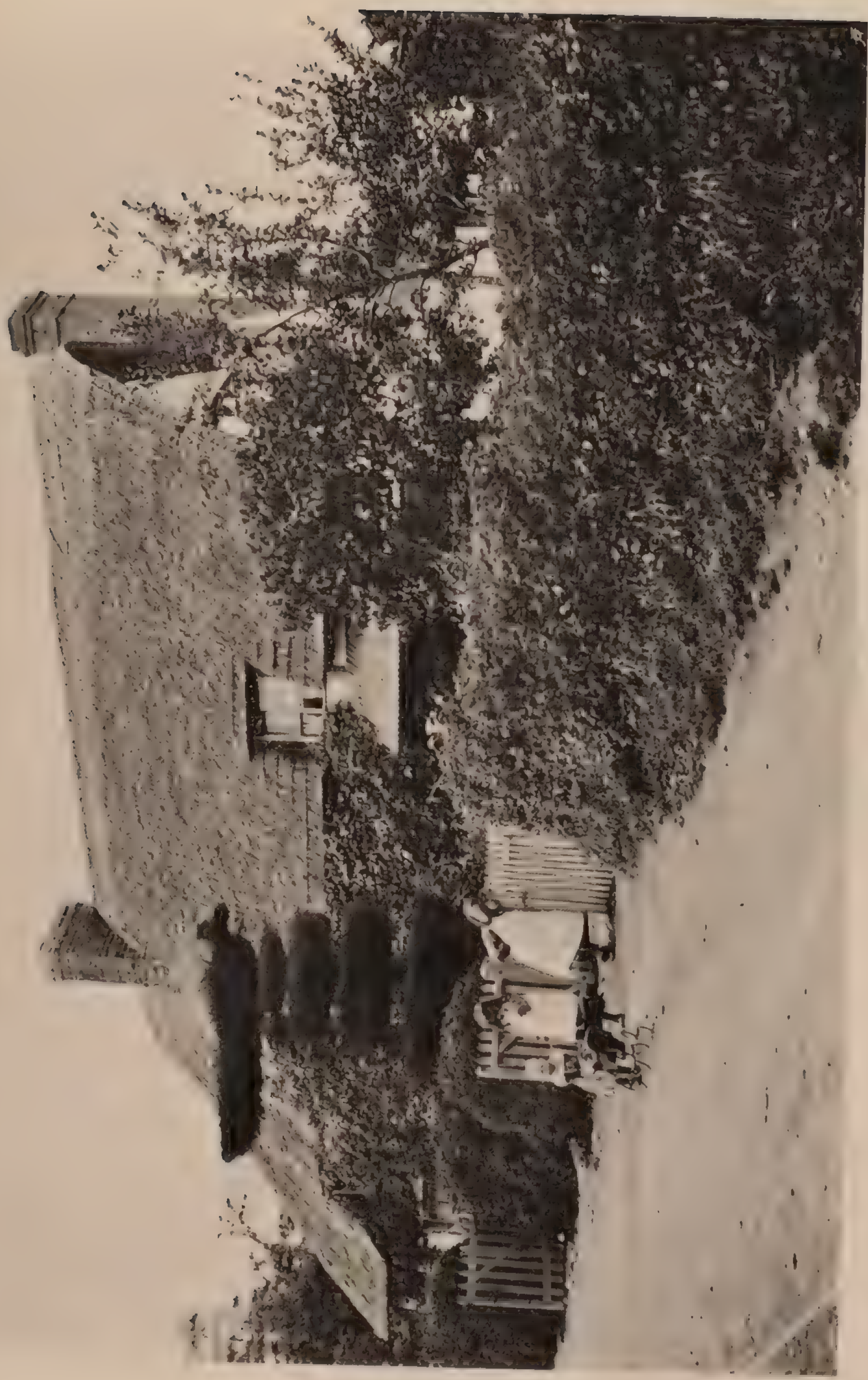
Coleridge felt so depressed at losing his friend and his stimulating influence that the inspiration left him. Great is the pity, for what would not the world now give for another poem full of strange fancies as those in "The Ancient Mariner"?

From Nether Stowey we had a delightful and long-to-be-remembered drive. Westward we followed a road along the foot of the lovely Quantocks, up and down hill by their sloping sides we went, now past fir-topped cliffs, now dipping down to sheltered valleys, anon rising again to high ground with glorious views opening out over wooded slopes, and over fertile plains stretching far away to the gleaming, sunlit sea. A bracing, breezy, inspiriting drive, with nothing therein that intruded on the eye to disturb its old-fashioned serenity. To use an artist's expression, "there was little to take hold of" in the landscape, no specially prominent feature that claimed attention to itself, but I think it was all the more charming and restful for that—shapely hills and stately woods, deep valleys and running streams, with here and there an old cottage and grey farmstead, all combined to make most beautiful scenery. To quote Coleridge:—

. . . joyance everywhere.

Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so filled,
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
Is music slumbering on her instrument.

Truly the air was not mute or still that day, though on many summer days it is, but the balmy breezes



A WAYSIDE COTTAGE.

dropped now and then into a semblance of stillness, and over all the land there brooded a sense of deep tranquillity. But the charm of the Quantocks is incommunicable in words.

It seems strange, to me, how neglected the Quantocks are by the general tourist; perhaps it is the most beautiful district in England left to us unspoilt by any outward signs of ugly or utilitarian modernism. That it has no presiding peak to attract the enterprising tripper is perhaps its picturesque salvation. Wordsworth felt deeply the charms of this English Arcadia, and very reluctant he was to leave it. Dorothy Wordsworth has given her impressions of the country, written when she and her brother were making their first memorable visit to Coleridge. "There is," she wrote, "everything here,—the sea, woods, wild as fancy ever painted,—and William and I in a wander by ourselves found out a sequestered waterfall in a dell formed by steep hills covered with full-grown timber trees." Coleridge, when on tour in Devonshire,— "the fairest county in England,"—wrote a letter (dated September 16, 1799) to his friend Thomas Poole, in which he thus expresses his appreciation of the Quantocks: "The views of Totnes and Dartmouth are among the most impressive things I have ever seen; but in general, what of Devonshire I have seen is tame to Quantock. . . . So much for the country!" And this appreciation confirms that of Southey's, already given, as to the superiority of North Somerset scenery—which, by the way, includes Exmoor—over that of Devonshire! But Devonshire

is far-famed, much written about, photographed, and painted, and Devonshire deserves all that has been written about it ; but of the thousands who know and love their Devonshire, how many, I wonder, ever visit the lovely land of North Somerset ?

CHAPTER VIII

Quantock superstitions and legends—A Somerset story—Old folk-airs—A pseudo-Roman tombstone—Cleeve Abbey—A monkish jest—An architectural mystery—The vale of flowers—Dunster—A quaint market-place—A fortified inn—Exmoor—A bit of wild England.

WHILST in the Quantock country, I must find room for one or two curious or amusing local customs, superstitions, and legends ; of each I may say

I cannot tell how the truth may be,
I say the tale as 'twas told to me.

The Quantock folk are oftentimes characters, and, I fancy, are inclined to be superstitious, though they will not confess to it, excepting, perhaps, to a sort of half-faith in pixies. If you asked one of them if he believed in ghosts he might reply, in the words of a certain witty French lady, "No ; but I'm afraid of them." I was told that on dark winter nights, when the winds blow "wild and loud," some of the Quantock folk have been known to declare that they have both seen and heard "Thor and Alfred's knights riding furiously over the hills and through the woods." I rather conclude, also, from what I gleaned, that they hold a lingering belief in witchcraft ; superstition dies hard

in this remote corner of England. For measles we learnt that parents have actually been known to drag their unfortunate children through three parishes in one day to effect "a certain remedy," failing the finding of a split ash tree to place them in; other equally astonishing things are done to cure whooping-cough and sundry ailments. As might be expected, "such treatments have not proved effectual, but still there are people who are prepared to continue them"—and hardly could faith farther go! Years past, in the spring-time, it was the custom of boys to go round the orchards and whip the trees in order to ensure a good crop, and the farmers would give them a drink of cider for so doing. According to the old couplet—

A woman, a whelp, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat them, the better they be.

But in old Somerset one has to read apple for walnut! This apple tree whipping is quite a different thing from the "apple-howling" that was, and may be still is, prevalent in many parts of England; this consists of a number of boys who surround a selected tree in an orchard, and sing the following incantation with the object of ensuring a fruitful year:—

Stand fast root, bear well top,
God send us a howling good crop;
Every twig, apples big,
Every bough, apples enow:
Hats full, caps full,
Bushels full, sacks full,
And our pockets full. Huzza! Huzza!

A Somerset version of the apple-howling, or, as I understand it is termed in that county, wassailing the apple trees, was given to me as follows :—

Yer's tu thee, good apple tree,
Be zure yu bud, be zure yu blaw,
And bring forth apples gude enow.

Hats vul ! caps vul !

Bushels vul, bags vul !

Pockets vul and awl !

Hurrah ! Hurrah !

These quaint old customs—whose origin is lost in the dim mists of antiquity—still survive in some of the remote districts of the country, and that in spite of the school-board and the railway. How delightful they are ! The modern youthful generation, I imagine, takes them more picturesquely than seriously.

The Somerset church clerks, too, are sometimes unconscious humorists, or, at least, the cause of humour in others ; in rare cases they are humorists with intention. A rather good story is told, truthfully or untruthfully, of one of them who, when showing the new rector over his church, asked, "Be you High or Low Church, sir ?" to which the rector diplomatically replied, "I belong to the sensible party." Now, whether the clerk was witty of set purpose, or whether the remark came naturally to him, I cannot say, but he is reported to have exclaimed, "Indeed, sir, I had no idea that there was such a party in the Church !" Many of the west-country church clerks are genuine characters, and possess considerable archæological knowledge ;

men with whom it is both profitable and delightful to chat; they take a great and intelligent interest in their churches, and an hour or more spent in their society is by no means an hour wasted. I only wish I never fell into worse company!

Then there is the church clerk who is credited as hailing from Somerset, and who adapted "Tate and Brady" to suit the occasion, thus:—

Why hop ye zo, ye little hills?
And what for do ye skip?
Is it because to preach to we
Be come the Lord Biship?

Ye little hills, why do ye skip?
And what do make ye hop?
Sure 'tis because to preach to we
Be come the Lord Bishop!

Now here he be to preach to we,
Zo let us all strike up
And zing a glorious zong of praise
To our own Lord Bishup!

I was told that generally the Somerset folk pronounce "s" as "z," always excepting in the word seven, but any reasonable explanation of this curious exception I failed to discover. As for the speech of the rural Somerset folk the following was given to me as an example, "Her bain't a-calling we, us don't belong to she."

A Quantock parson related to us the following local story, which he vouched to me was perfectly true, otherwise I could hardly have credited it. It happened that some new people had come to live in a certain Quantock village, and in reply to curious

inquiries as to whether they were church or chapel folk, an old inhabitant who had interviewed them said, "I can't make them out, for church folk either drink or swear, and chapel folk be either liars or dishonest, but as far as I can discover these people do neither, so I thinks they can have no religion!"

Another curious story of the same locality was related to me by the same authority, though for the truth of this he would not vouch, nor do I blame him! He merely repeated to me the veracious episode as it came to his hearing. I can now only remember a hazy outline of the tale, but it ran somewhat as follows—even the exact date was given to me only to be forgotten. However, say a century ago, the blacksmith of a certain Quantock village (the name was duly stated, but, like the date, has gone from my memory) was awakened late one night by a stranger on horseback, whose horse had cast a shoe. Now, strangers in the district were rarely seen, so the blacksmith's curiosity was aroused; however, he consented to get up and go to his forge and do the needful, but something peculiar about the belated traveller's appearance and manner alarmed the blacksmith to such an extent indeed that he suspected him of being nothing less than the devil! Now, the blacksmith had the reputation of being a man with an iron nerve—indeed, he had publicly boasted that he would shoe the horse of the very devil himself should he ever come to him. Perhaps it was the remembrance of this boast that made the bold blacksmith suspicious of the long-cloaked, mysterious

stranger who roused him from his slumbers at such an untimely hour as midnight. Anyhow, on some excuse, he left the unwelcome visitor in the forge whilst the fire drew up, and called upon the parson, who lived close by, for his advice. The parson told him to shoe the horse, but to accept no payment for the job, and promised that he would come and watch outside the smithy. Thus reassured the blacksmith went back and did what was required, but upon a gold piece being offered him as payment, he declined to accept that or anything. Then the mysterious stranger threw off his cloak and revealed himself as the devil, and in a furious rage exclaimed, "If it had not been for that cursed bird in black watching"—meaning the parson—"you would have taken my money and sold your soul to me." The legend is surely a near relation to the one of St. Dunstan, or perhaps of Wayland Smith. Even to-day, we were assured, horses always shy when passing that special smithy. It would have been interesting to drive by there and test the fact, but, unfortunately, we drove a motor car, which, having no nerves, was useless for the purpose!

The story is perhaps hardly worth relating, but I give it as a type of the legends that still prevail in the Quantocks, of which the number is legion. The story should be heard on the spot. To do it justice it should be solemnly related by a native, who, if he does not actually believe in the legend, still would have you credit it! The story, I realise full well, has lost greatly in my condensed relation of it, for, I candidly confess, for the sake of brevity,

to have neglected sundry picturesque, if awesome, details; still I have given the gist thereof to the best of my ability and recollection. Possibly the whole thing arose out of nothing more than a belated traveller on horseback, in the pre-railway days, having cast a shoe in the village late one night, and having called upon the blacksmith to replace it. In the old times a trifling incident often formed the groundwork for a stirring episode; like "the three black crows," once a story started it grew more and more thrilling with every teller. Country folk love the marvellous—it gives a zest to their monotonous, unexciting life. It may be that the blacksmith was drunk when he started the tale of a mysterious stranger coming to him—the villagers would do the rest; three days, or less, would amply suffice to convert a mysterious stranger into the devil himself. Then the blacksmith would become a local hero, and have no desire to lessen his importance. I confess that the detail of the parson is a difficulty; perhaps this is a later addition. However, the fact remains that this legend, with others, has lingered long in the country-side, and was not wholly discredited by the forefathers of the present-day Quantock rustics.

Old folklore, curious superstitions, and quaint customs promise to linger on for an indefinite period in the remote districts of England, but folk-music is, alas, rapidly disappearing. In times past collectors were more intent on capturing the words than the airs, so that the former, though of lesser value, have been, more or less correctly, preserved

in print. Only of late, as far as I am aware, has any one cared or troubled to recover and record the music that accompanies the song. When in the Quantock country we were delighted to learn that a serious and successful attempt had been made to obtain from certain old Somerset natives some of these old tunes which, it may be noted, are essentially English, whilst most of our other music comes from abroad. I rejoice to know that the "home-made" article is being rescued from oblivion. We had, by a stroke of unexpected good fortune, the opportunity of hearing some of the recently recovered airs, and were struck by their high quality, quaintness, originality, and pure melody.

After much pleasant driving we came to the pretty little town of Williton; we took it for a straggling village, but the inhabitants call it a town, and I presume they ought to know; if we had any doubts they were set to rest by a man who exclaimed, "It be a town because it has a work-house!" In a wood close at hand stands an upright carved stone slab with a pseudo-Roman inscription thereon, and above this a rudely sculptured female head and bust; this is manifestly a manufactured antique, set up there for what purpose it is difficult to imagine, unless for a joke. The local folk declare it to be Mother Shipton's tomb, and believe, or pretend to believe, that such a personage is buried there. Possibly this legend brings a few stray visitors to Williton, so that it is to the interest of the inhabitants to accept it. I know of a certain farm-house in the country that gained an easy repu-

tation of being haunted owing to a joking remark of the farmer's wife made originally quite innocently ; this reputation brought a good many visitors to see the haunted room—as a matter of fact it brought me there, and cost me a tip of half a crown. At first the farmer was greatly enraged at the constant coming of strangers, and soundly rated his wife for her stupid joking, but when he found it “brought grist to the mill” he accepted the inevitable with a good deal of grace. Some evil reputations may, by careful management, become truly valuable assets. Indeed, I understood that a neighbouring farmer, seeing that there “was money in it,” endeavoured to start a rival haunted chamber in his house ; but the opposition failed, people began to suspect a fraud, and even the original haunted house had in time to retire from the business !

Soon after leaving Williton we found ourselves in Washford, where, to the left, we espied, shyly peeping above some apple orchards, the grey gable-end of Cleeve Abbey gateway. The ruins of this ancient Cistercian monastery, founded in 1188, are of great interest owing to the excellent state of preservation of the domestic buildings, though the church has vanished, contrary to the general rule ; for, with the exceptions of Fountains in Yorkshire and Beaulieu in the New Forest, I think the domestic offices of our abbeys have disappeared, whilst the churches have remained, though many, of course, in a more or less ruined condition.

The ancient gate-house to Cleeve Abbey, grey-green with age and weather-worn, with its broken

and buttressed walls fern-fringed at the top, forms a pleasing architectural picture. Above the arched entrance is the following Latin inscription that permits of a double reading :—

Porta patens esto
Nulli claudaris honesto,

which may be rendered, “O door, be open : be closed to no honest man,” or “O door, be open to none : be closed to any honest man” ; or it may be roughly rendered in a rhyming couplet one way—

Stand open, door, with welcome wide,
Be to no honest man denied,

and the other way—

O door, to none give welcome wide,
Be to each honest man denied.

Those old monks loved a joke in words as well as in sculptured stone or carved wood. Above the inscription is a square window, and immediately above this again a bold carving of the Crucifixion, with a niche on either side of it. Beyond the gate-house, across a grassy space, are the remains of the fifteenth - century cloisters and the mass of the domestic buildings. Notable amongst these is the refectory, a truly magnificent apartment, situated above some small chambers on the ground floor ; it is upwards of fifty feet long and twenty feet broad. The roof of this apartment is in a wonderful state of preservation ; it is of richly decorated walnut, and rests on corbels of carved angels. Presumably

the excellent state of the roof is owing to the fact that the worm does not attack walnut; anyway the lasting qualities of this wood, as shown in this and other instances, may give a hint to the modern architect whose clients may be able to afford, and have the desire, to build enduringly.

The dormitory is another fine apartment, over a hundred feet long; this is lighted by lancet windows that appear never to have been glazed, but merely provided with shutters; from this it does not seem that the monks of Cleeve Abbey led exactly a life of luxury, for shutters would prove but a poor protection against the winter frosts and winds. Then there is the sacristy, a small arched chamber under the dormitory, with a beautiful little piscina, the back of which shows signs of having been painted with a decorative design. A peculiar feature about this sacristy is the existence of a curious circular opening in the east wall. The original purpose of this is puzzling; tradition says it was intended for the transference of a monk's body to the abbey burial-ground beyond, though, as there was an altar below the opening, such theory can hardly be considered conclusive. It may have contained a "rose-window," but this is a purely conjectural solution on my part of an architectural mystery. There is also the chapter-house, entered by an archway that appears never to have possessed a door, and lighted by windows that never appear to have been glazed; the monks' day-room, over sixty feet long, and other offices. The group of domestic buildings are so well pre-

served and so complete as to be exceedingly interesting and valuable, for there is little difficulty in tracing out their plan and understanding their purpose. The visitor to Cleeve Abbey should, without much trouble, be able to obtain a fairly clear idea of the inner life and working of a medieval monastery.

Man and Time have wrought the ruin of this ancient pile,—and man has been a greater sinner than Time,—but it is still beautiful in spite of both, perhaps more beautiful deserted and decayed, and certainly more poetic and pathetic, than when in the glory of its Gothic prime. To the musing traveller—I know such travellers are rare, but still a few exist—these interesting, comparatively remote, and not much visited ruins strongly appeal for their peaceful picturesqueness, and for the sentiment of the past that broods over them. The past belonged to its founders, the present to us : of old, men retired to this remote spot to escape from a striving world ; to-day the rest-seeking pilgrim may likewise escape to it from the modern striving and hurrying world, and find even a deeper tranquillity !

Whilst the hills around remain the same as before, the abbey arose out of the green and lonely Vale of Flowers, as the monks happily called it ; and whilst the little, clear-watered stream, that fed the moat and fish-stews, still glides and gurgles on as of yore, the buildings, erected with so much toil and trouble, slowly crumble away : a pathetic reminder of the mutability of man's work and the immutability of Nature—for the hills, the woods, the

grass, the flowers around are every summer renewed with fresh vitality ; only the abbey has grown aged and decayed.

Leaving the ancient ruins and the peaceful valley—so peaceful was the spot, it seemed as though the monks of old had cast a spell of eternal quietude over it—we drove on, wondering where next we should come to, for our maps were carefully stowed away in the car, so that we had only a very hazy idea of the country and whither we were tending. We half expected to turn up at the sea-coast, and probably might have done so, but that we caught a glimpse of an isolated wooded hill, crowned by a grey round tower, and to this point we steered our course as nearly as the roads would allow. Gradually we approached the object of our search, and discovered it was close to Dunster, and called the Watch Tower, not a genuine old castle keep, as we fondly imagined, it being a comparatively modern structure, built there for the sake of picturesqueness ; would that always the picturesque were so studied ! This tower overlooks Dunster, and presently we found ourselves in that quaint old town. Of course we had heard of Dunster ; who has not ? But in spite of the many charming paintings, sketches, and photographs we had seen of it, we were not prepared for the delightful thrill of pleasure that the first sight of the picturesque old place gave us. Set amidst wooded hills, and surrounded by the most beautiful scenery, this old-fashioned little country town is worthy of its setting, and for itself alone truly merits the too

often misapplied terms of quaint and romantic. Of all the English towns I know, it is the most picturesque and eye-pleasing: the only other one I can recall that approaches it in these respects is Ludlow in Shropshire, and Ludlow lags far behind!

Perhaps the best view of Dunster is the one that was presented to us on entering, though all the views of it are good. Close before us, in the centre of the place, stood its curious yarn-market—an ancient and picturesque octagonal structure of oak, with upright posts supporting a roof set around with little dormer windows, and capped by a little open sort of turret with a weather-vane on the top, the last bearing the letters G. L. and the date 1647. Close to this is the fine old hostelry of the Luttrell Arms, with its weather-worn stone porch, pierced with arrow slits on either side, that tell of its ancientness and recall the stormy days long past. That porch suggests romance. It is not every day you come upon an hostelry prepared for defence by such medieval devices; possibly the porch may have belonged formerly to some fortified building that was not then an inn; but of its history we could unearth nothing. If only its stones could speak, they might “a story unfold”! Beyond the yarn-market the short street with its time-toned houses ends at the foot of a wooded height, from the top of which the ivy-clad towers of Dunster castle look down; they no longer frown upon the little homely town. The buildings of the place all group delightfully and effectively to make a picturesque whole;

an artist could not have conceived anything better—or as good.

During our halt at Dunster we consulted our map to find our bearings, after which we decided to drive southward, right through the heart of Exmoor, for, though on previous journeys we had driven both north and south of that glorious tract of wild country, we had not crossed it before. Exmoor itself was new ground to us; Dartmoor was familiar, but Exmoor, the land of the red deer, was unknown!

On leaving the town, our attention was arrested by a curious and ancient house with three overhanging stories: this, we learnt, was called "The Nunnery." Beyond that fact, no one seemed to know anything of its history. Perhaps its name explains its past, yet the building hardly looks secluded enough for the purpose of a nunnery, facing close upon the public highway as it does, and presumably always did, and with its windows opening directly thereon.

We were soon in the wilds of Exmoor, and with every mile we traversed the scenery became wilder; excepting for a few cottages and scattered farmhouses that grew scarcer as we progressed, till, for a time, they ceased altogether, our eyes rested on nothing but thick woods and rounded hills. Prominent amongst the hills was Dunkery Beacon, its summit bare and open to storm and sunshine. The hills of Exmoor are no "sky-scrapers" (Dunkery Beacon has only an altitude above sea-level of 1700 feet), but they are bold and rugged of out-

line, suggestive of pleasant ramblings and rough scramblings ; moreover, they look higher than they really are, because they are dignified, and, after all, it is the impression that a scene conveys, rather than the actual height of its hills, that appeals to the average traveller. To him figures are nothing, impressions everything—and our impressions of Exmoor were those of wild beauty, not oppressive or drearily wild, but sufficiently so to be inspiring. Grandeur does not belong to height alone, mass and form have much to do with it.

Unlike Dartmoor, which has been likened to a crushed mountain, Exmoor is in parts richly wooded, besides being well watered. At first we followed alongside of a little stream flowing northward, then, after crossing a stretch of elevated country, we came to the youthful Exe gambolling along its rocky bed—a stream which imperceptibly grew into a rushing river, fretting and foaming in fine style amongst the boulders that would impede its course, and making the valley musical with its murmurings. A strong wind sprung up as we penetrated the moor, and blew in fitful gusts, now sweeping down the wooded steeps with a sound

Like the sea,
When ocean, bounding, shouts with all its waves.

As our road followed the valley, there was always the gurgling and plashing of the river to keep us company. It seemed as though the river were chatting to us ! and there was the gleam, the movement, and the sparkle of it to enliven the prospect.

As we climbed the hill-sides the voice of the river became less distinct ; but as we rose, the sur—sur—surring of the wind amongst the woods became the more pronounced, for it made a mighty harp of the forest trees. Nature's music is always companionable ; it has a language of its own, and in every land the language is the same. England, though a small country and thickly populated, is not all tamed or cultivated ; indeed, I think that Exmoor is beyond being tamed : the soil is too poor, too rocky, and in parts too boggy for profitable cultivation, and it is, I believe, unblest with minerals to any extent. As an American writer informs his countrymen, "We think of England as a conventionalised island, with a tamed and groomed landscape, and inhabited by a sophisticated race. We forget the wild spots and wild passions that linger in such fastnesses as Dartmoor and Exmoor, until a story by Hardy or Phillpotts reminds us that London and Kent are not all England, nor is the Cockney its only inhabitant."

CHAPTER IX

Through the heart of Exmoor—A stag hunt—The land of the wild red deer—A primitive bridge—Forty miles of beauty—Belated —The wayside inn—A curious charity—"The crime of duelling"—Very ancient history—A scold's chair—"Two great curses of a man's life."

So we drove on through the heart of Exmoor with the waving woods and heathery hills on either hand, whilst all the way the tumbling river kept us welcome and cheerful company. However, one cannot expect beauty to last for ever, and at a point where the valley widened out, we came to a timber-mill and a few scattered houses, all of the modern commonplace type. After the delightful wild loneliness of the moor, these few buildings asserted their ugly utility out of all proportion to their size: an old-fashioned Somerset or Devon stone-built cottage, with its whitewashed walls and general look of homeliness, is always a picturesque feature in the landscape, for either is in harmony with it; but the cottage of to-day is usually square, and not only unpicturesque, but aggressively so. Owing to the subversive ease of conveyance, bricks follow you wherever you go, even into a land where stone is the natural building material; so houses of much the same set pattern, without character or interest, rise

up everywhere. In the outskirts of a town they are not of much consequence, for there you do not look for beauty ; but in the country they are eyesores. The modern builder is the greatest spoiler of scenery extant, for he penetrates into every nook and corner of the land.

It was a sad contrast—this coming suddenly and unexpectedly upon a vision of ugliness—with the glorious drive we had through many miles of rare and unspoilt beauty. Then we came upon an intruding railway, a station, and a large hotel close by ; the glamour of the wild woods and of the lonely hills was gone. You cannot romance within sound of the locomotive whistle, for, however lovely the scenery around, it utterly destroys the illusion of remoteness ; and were it not for its illusions, what a dull, prosaic world this would be !

At Dulverton station, which is, however, about two miles from the little town of that name, the large, modern hotel, though offering us excellent accommodation, was a poor substitute for the homely little inn that we had fondly imagined we should find. So sure had we felt in the morning of coming upon an unpretentious hostel to our liking during the day, that we had purposely neglected to provision our luncheon basket, and now we were hungry, and our choice of an inn was the choice of Hobson. It chanced, moreover, that we arrived there at an inopportune time, for there had been a stag-hunt, and the stag had been killed close to Dulverton, so the hotel was full of sportsmen, and the yard was full of horses, and I am

afraid that our car was hardly welcomed. However, the ostler found us standing-room in an odd corner. "'Twill serve for a car," said he, whilst the horsemen looked on disapprovingly. One man, indeed, loudly expressed his opinion—we did not ask it, by the way—that motor cars were "beastly nuisances, and should not be allowed upon the road." Curiously enough, at the hotel we stopped at in Exeter the conditions were exactly reversed. There the extensive yard was full of motors when we arrived, and motors only, when presently a man drove in with a gig. At the sight of so many cars his horse promptly shied, and nearly caused the gig to collide with a fine large car, whereupon the chauffeur wrathfully exclaimed, "Them dangerous animals ought not to be allowed on the roads"; thus almost repeating the courteous gentleman's remarks at Dulverton, only the word "animal" was substituted for "motor car"!

Within the hotel there were so many hungry clamouring people that we had to wait long to be served, but eventually secured a table between two others occupied respectively by sportsmen and sportswomen who were eagerly discussing the day's run: two ladies occupied the table on one side of us, and two big, stout men the other. The curious fact that we noticed was this, that the two ladies enjoyed a hearty meal of roast beef, followed by bread and cheese, and accompanied by Bass's bottled ale, whilst the two big burly men had only a plum-cake for their repast, and whisky-and-soda for their beverage.

Leaving our comfortable, but uninteresting, hotel, we set out for the town of Dulverton, and a very charming drive of two miles along the wooded valley of the Barle, that most delightful of Devon rivers, it proved to be. But we met so many people on horseback—and at least every other horse shied badly at the very sight of our car, and many of the riders looked “unutterable things” at us, and some seemed quite ready to part company with their mounts—that our enjoyment of the scenery was somewhat marred. Dulverton is not altogether a desirable place to visit in a motor car during the stag-hunting season! By the way, the run that day had a somewhat eventful ending, according to an account we afterwards saw in a local paper, which I here transcribe:—“The stag was taken amid a scene of indescribable confusion, caused by his upsetting two bee-skeps, whose fierce black Ligurian occupants furiously attacked horses and hounds, huntsmen, horsemen, and even the stag himself.” Would we had witnessed that episode! Perhaps it was the remembrance of the bee-stings that made the horses we met on the way so restive; they might have mistaken our car with the hum of its engines for a sort of movable bee-skep!

At Dulverton, situated in the heart of the land of the wild red deer, and surrounded by forest and fell, we hoped to spend a day or so, in order to quietly explore the more remote recesses of Exmoor; but the Fates ordained otherwise, for all the accommodation in the place was taken by the followers of the staghounds and their friends. So we merely

stopped to secure a few photographs, and to consider what our next move should be. After a glance at our map we decided to rejoin the Exe, and to follow it down through Tiverton to the capital of Devon, then we should have explored that lovely river from its source in the lonely moors to the thronged and "Ever Faithful" city, where a few miles beyond it ends its wanderings in the all-absorbing sea.

The delightful drive down the valley of the Exe was a scenic surprise to us, or rather a series of scenic surprises. We fully expected to find the country comparatively tame and uninteresting after Exmoor; but tame it was not, for hill and dale, grey rock and winding river, waving woods and heathery slopes, with more than a suspicion of wildness thrown in, called to mind the "North Countrie," only perhaps the general tone of the landscape was warmer, and the foliage of the trees more luxuriant than is usually to be found north of the Thames. We had not proceeded far before we came to a lovely reach of the river; many-tinted woods were all around us, backed by a blue distance of undulating hills, and through a gap in the leafy trees by the side of our road we caught a vista of the Exe, flowing clear and full, gleaming and sparkling, down the greenest of green valleys.

A little way off the river was spanned by a quaint and primitive bridge built of three rough stone piers; great baulks of timber laid horizontally from pier to pier carried the roadway above, and a strong wooden railing on either side of the road-



IN THE VALLEY OF THE EXP.

way gave protection to foot-passengers and other traffic. This primitive and picturesque form of bridge is frequently found in North Wales, especially in the Snowdon district, but I have rarely met with it elsewhere: it is the simplest form of bridge-construction possible, and, I think, pleases the eye because of its simplicity; it calls for no skilled labour in the building, still it is strong and substantial, and when the roadway, as in Wales, is carried on slabs of stone instead of timber, it is also enduring. Give a child a box of wooden bricks, and this is the form of bridge that he would naturally make with them: so primitive man doubtless thus constructed the first bridge with the rough materials at hand, as such construction calls for no special ingenuity.

The rough stone piers and square lines of these bridges suit well a wild landscape, for their square lines contrast effectively with the flowing curves of Nature, though the bridges themselves are too rugged to harmonise with a soft and purely pastoral country. We took a photograph of this picturesque bridge, showing the wealth of woods around, the hills beyond, and the gleaming river winding away into the misty distance; and though the photograph reproduced here is not as successful as I could wish, owing to the bad light at the time of taking it, still I think that the reproduction will convey some idea of the wooded and hilly beauty of the Exe valley. Had no name been given to this photograph, it is quite possible that a travelled man might have guessed that it represented a view in wild Wales.

From Dunster, over Exmoor, and down the Exe valley to Exeter, the distance is forty-three miles according to my Road-Book, and I do not believe that in all fair England another forty-three miles of such continuous beauty is anywhere to be found, or if the sixteen further miles through the Quantock country from Nether Stowey to Dunster be added, it makes a total of close upon sixty miles of the most lovely scenery; I think I can safely challenge any one to name another sixty miles, more or less to within a mile, of such continuous beauty anywhere in Great Britain—or out of it. Moreover, the scenery had everywhere a friendly look, a quality to be felt but difficult to precisely define; in parts it was wildly grand without being austere, the rest was softly sylvan without being in the least degree tame, and all the way it was interesting.

The quaint and ancient town of Tiverton delayed us not, for although the west was growing golden and the daylight was fading fast, and the time had come when the traveller generally looks out for an inn whereat to take his ease, yet the weather was so gloriously fine, the scenery so to our mind, that we determined to press on to Exeter; we would make the utmost of the day, the present belonged to us, to-morrow it might rain. The motor, unlike a horse, never tires, and therein, to me, lies its chief charm, for the motorist can always extend his wanderings at will; in this respect the machine scores against mere muscle. Indeed, speaking from our own experience, the farther we went the better the car appeared to travel. There are few

things, perhaps, more enjoyable to a contemplative mind than an evening drive through beautiful scenery, and when that scenery is fresh the charm is all the greater. Even that city-loving Dr. Johnson, when posting across country, at the end of a long day's journey, exclaimed to his companion Boswell, "Life has little better to offer than this."

So in the glamour of that tranquil hour that comes just before the sunset, having passed through Tiverton, we proceeded on our pleasant way. Still the rippling Exe kept us murmuring company, for the road and river were never far apart; still the wooded hills sloped down to the waterside, only now the woods looked dark and shadowy; the far-away hills showed faint, dreamy, and unsubstantial as a cloud, whilst the country ahead assumed a dim, mysterious aspect. One's poetic imaginings amid such surroundings had full scope; jutting crags and grey, uncertain forms upon the hill-sides were converted into ruined abbeys and feudal castles at discretion, and all the woods became enchanted forests! For the moment we were travelling through a land of old romance wherein nothing seemed quite real. As before remarked, the poets do the most of our romancing for us; it is a pleasant and profitable change, at times, to do the romancing for ourselves.

Thus we drove dreamily on whilst the twilight gathered around, the golden sky became dark and grey, and a deep hush fell upon our little world, broken only by the liquid rushing of the river. Then, at last, the lights of Exeter gleamed ahead,

and soon afterwards we found ourselves traversing the well-lighted, tram-laid, and crowded city streets ; at least, to us they seemed crowded after the deserted country roads. Our romancing came to a sudden end ; we were a part of the every-day world once more, a bright and bustling world truly, but not a poetic or a picturesque one ; at least we failed to find those qualities in it. Just then we hungered for the open country again, and for a humble wayside inn, but for that night we needs must put up with a comfortable up-to-date hotel "replete with every convenience." It is not often that the traveller, especially when belated, complains of too much luxury ! But driving all day long in the open air, in close touch with Nature, makes one desire the simple life, simple ways, and simple fare, such as may, with good fortune, be found at the real old roadside inn ; one of "those good old taverns," as Dr. Johnson called them, of which he declared that "no other human contrivance had produced so much happiness." It was at a lonely wayside hostel at Chapel House in Oxfordshire that the famous doctor laid down this dictum ; so, although he professed to dislike the country, he appears to have got a good deal of pleasure therein.

To arrive at a quiet, unpretending country inn, to be received by a smile of welcome by a jovial host, to have your comforts looked after by a motherly landlady, these are a fitting end to a long day's journey : the poetry of rest after the toil of travel ! But I am rather exacting about the choice of my inn : to satisfy me it must be clean, cosy, and

comfortable, and, be it honestly confessed, all country inns do not possess these three desirable virtues; but, in a motor car, if you do not approve of your proposed quarters, you can drive on till you come to others more to your liking. All the way down the Exe valley from Tiverton we searched in vain for our ideal inn, whilst Longfellow's poetic picture of such a one came to mind:—

The windows of the wayside inn
Gleamed red with firelight through the leaves
Of woodbine, hanging from the eaves
Their crimson curtains, red and thin.

A region of repose it seems,
A place of slumber and of dreams
Remote among the wooded hills.

We were "remote among the wooded hills," but our visions, though alert, caught no gleam of ruddy light thrown athwart the darkness from "the windows of a wayside inn" to bid us a welcome. The poet and the painter can create his ideal; the wayfarer is under the disadvantage of having to discover the actuality!

Our choice of an inn at Exeter fell upon Pople's New London Hotel, an ancient hostelry in spite of its name, for it was formerly a famous coaching house, and is mentioned with the Old London Hotel in Paterson's Roads and other pre-railway travelling guides. But the old inn has been much altered since those much-lauded days, possibly to the gain of convenience and comfort; that is according to modern ideas, but certainly to the loss

of the picturesque and the flavour of the past, for which latter things the musing traveller is satisfied to sacrifice a good deal of glare and glitter and so-called luxuries—if it can be called a sacrifice to do without that which you do not desire! However, there is one alteration which is a genuine improvement: the court-yard has been roofed over and converted into a capacious lounge; this lends itself to general sociability, forming, as it does, a meeting-ground for all the guests gathered there. Many an old coaching inn has been so altered for the better, though all other alterations strike me for the worse, including *tables-d'hôte* and the electric light in place of candles and lamps. It was a most happy idea to enclose their court-yards thus, and so provide the traveller with something more spacious and inviting to take his ease in than the frequently cramped and sometimes stuffy sitting-room, for which also an extra charge is made.

Whilst sitting in the lounge, enjoying a post-prandial pipe, I made the acquaintance of a fellow-motorist, a parson by his dress, and a jovial-looking parson to boot; he forcibly brought to my mind the line, "Religion never was intended to make our pleasures less." No medieval monk, on a feast day, could have looked merrier than he! He informed me that he had only recently become the happy possessor of a motor car, in which, with a chauffeur of no great experience, he had driven all the way from Scotland, having suffered many misadventures during his progress, "But," exclaimed he proudly, "at times I did over thirty miles an hour." To which I

remarked, in as serious a tone as I could command, "Then you must have broken the law. Now, if a parson breaks the law, what may not a layman do?" Then I quoted for his benefit the old classic saying, "The corruption of the best is the worst." "But I only did it on a deserted road," he pleaded. "But does not the law hold good on a deserted road?" we queried. His answer was a broad smile, and then the subject dropped. Of course I know, full well, that no motorist ever exceeds the speed-limit except on a deserted road!

Our conversation ended, I sought further entertainment, but finding no one else to chat with, I amused myself with glancing over a stray copy or two of some local papers that I discovered laid aside in one corner of the lounge. Now, there was a time when nothing would induce me to take up a local paper, for what possible concern could purely local topics have for me? However, I have discovered that in such papers one may now and then come upon items of interest, and odds and ends of curious information, that repay perusal, so when nothing better serves to pass a few spare minutes away, I make a point of glancing down their columns on the chance of discovering anything worthy of note. Of course one mostly "draws blank," but in this case I was rewarded. The first paragraph that arrested my attention I deemed of sufficient interest to copy in full in my note-book. It was headed "Repeating the Catechism," and I think it worthy of being repeated here; besides it shows a sample of the entertainment that may

occasionally be extracted from country papers. This, then, is it :—

Mr. Phillimore, charity commissioner, has been conducting an inquiry into the charities of the parish of Ilsington, South Devon. In respect to a sum of £360 left by one Ann Hale, it was stated that the interest of the money had to be paid to six of the oldest poor people who were able to repeat the catechism openly in the parish church at Ilsington. Mr. Phillimore : Is that done now, because the custom would be rather picturesque? The Vicar : Picturesque, but not altogether edifying. It is an extraordinary and unique thing, and I do not think that there is a similar charity in the country. The custom of having it every two or three years has sprung up lately. The colloquial way of making application to me is, "Please, sir, is it my turn to say my prayers this year?" It used to be competitive originally, but the practice has been dropped. Each person saying the Catechism gets 22s. or 23s. Mr. Phillimore : That is worth saying the Catechism for, and I think the custom ought to be maintained.

For one I am inclined to agree with Mr. Phillimore, for so many of these time-honoured and curious customs have been for ever lost to us, that it would be a great pity not to preserve the remnant which happily remain. In a number of cases money has been left to pay for a sermon to be preached upon some special subject that is now but of antiquarian interest, and therein lies its peculiar charm. It comes to the church-attending wayfarer as a quaint surprise to listen, in a rural fane, to a long exhortation against the wickedness of duelling, and such an exhortation may still be heard yearly on a certain Sunday in the parish church of Berrow, Worcestershire. We owe this to a lady who lived in the neighbourhood, and whose lover was killed

in a duel there. Upon her death a clause in her will was found stipulating that the rent of a certain meadow "should be for ever devoted to the payment of a minister for annually delivering a sermon in Berrow church on the crime of duelling," and to this day that sermon is paid for and preached.

Then, again, if in Leicester on a particular Sunday, the traveller attending one of the churches there may hear from the pulpit a long discourse upon "the glorious and ever-memorable victory" over the Spanish Armada, for in 1640 Thomas Haynes, a citizen of London, died, leaving in his will twenty shillings a year for a sermon to be preached annually in Leicester in reference to the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The churches in the centre of the town are invited in turn to carry out the testator's wish. And long may the sermon be preached, and it should be worth hearing! The traveller in rural England may come upon many other instances of legacies being left for similar purposes, though whether such bequests are always acted upon I cannot say. I could select several further examples of these from my note-books, gleaned during my wanderings across country, did space permit.

But to change the subject. In one of the local papers we came upon an account of a curious relic of a bygone civilisation—a Scolds' Chair, which, with Ducking Stools and Scolds' Bridles, appear at one time to have been not only in vogue, but in frequent use, the last as late as 1772 according to *Chambers's Dictionary*. The paragraph giving

particulars of this was of special interest owing to the presentation inscription and verses thereon, and I think is worthy of being quoted. "The chair in question, a fine example of an ancient instrument of correction—the Scold's Chair,—is dated 1723; it is of elaborately carved oak, and is so controlled by a lever from behind that the sitter may be locked in at will. On the canopy there is an inscription: 'Presented to Archibald Acheson, Earl of Gosford,' and below the following lines:—

If you have a wife who scolds,
Life indeed is bitter:
So in this chair you'd better sit her.
Then go out and take your pleasure,
Come back, release her at your leisure,
And, after all, too light a measure."

A curious present, surely, to give any married man, nobleman or commoner! I remember reading an inscription deeply cut in the big oak beam over an ancient fireplace of an old Yorkshire home that, quoting from memory, ran as follows:—

A smoky chimney and a scolding wife
Are the two great curses of a man's life.

I trust it was a bachelor who caused this halting couplet to be inscribed there, and not the outcome of a married experience, and I further trust that his chimney never smoked. Can it be that the wives of the olden time were more given to scolding than those of the present day, I wonder, or why so many past-time references to this real or supposed failing in them?

CHAPTER X

An old coaching hostelry—Changed times—"The chief charm of English travel"—Loitering by the way—No inn for miles—Bread "aged 69"!—Antique frauds—The virtue of distance—The longest road in Britain—The personality of places—Enmore Church and Castle—Two old helmets—A curious sale—Strange customs.

EARLY next morning, when inspecting our car, we came upon the landlord in the hotel yard, which happened to be crowded with motors, some already getting ready for the road. The sight gave us food for thought: here was an old coaching and posting inn, the yard of which was thronged with motor cars, and not a single horse was to be seen! Possibly the landlord divined our thoughts, for he remarked, "In the old days sixty coaches used to pull up at this house every week day, and no less than four hundred horses were stabled here. Now, in the summer-time, the large majority of our visitors arrive by motor car."

The revival of the road has become an accomplished fact; long years after the coming of the railway, the highways sunk into a deep somnolence, apparently never to waken more,—some, in parts, even became grass-grown from little use; then

appeared the cycle; that in a mild way brought back some little life to them, but it is the motor car that has really restored to the highways and byways their long-lost life and traffic, that has roused up the astonished landlords of the wayside inns, who hardly hoped to find such custom come again their way. The sound of the motor horn is heard all over the land; it may not be a musical sound, but there is a suggestion of life and movement in it, and people now begin to talk about the best road to the North, or to the West, or to wherever they may be going, the hills *en route*, and the scenery on the way; whereas but a few years ago, the despised cyclist excepted, no one appeared to know or care anything about the roads, their hilliness or levelness, or any other matter concerning them, for everybody travelled by railway then. At least the motor car has given to a vast number of Englishmen the opportunity of seeing and realising the beauties of their own country. In times past our ancestors, poor as well as rich, had perforce to travel by road, so that they became acquainted with the scenery of their own land if they travelled at all.

We are beginning to use the old roads again for the purpose of through travel as we use the railway; but by railway we merely depart and arrive, careless of all that lies between; now to the traveller by car the points of departure and arrival are minor considerations—the journey is the thing; it is that which lingers in the memory, with its succession of varied scenery and occasional incidents on the way.

We have revived the romance of travel, for every extended road journey becomes more or less a romance! After the coaching and posting days were ended, until the coming of the motor car, there were vast stretches of lovely landscape wasting their beauties on a few unappreciative rustics. To travel by road is to feel the rise and the fall of the ground beneath one's wheels, to understand the geography of the country, the grouping and height of the hills, the lay of the valleys, the course of the rivers, the extent of the plains, the fens, the forests, the spread of the moors, and the true relation of one to the other. You approach scenery thus in a natural way, for the world faces the road, whilst, as a rule, it turns its back on the rail.

The glory of the motor car is that it has restored to us the freedom of private travel; the curse of it is the inconsiderate driver. Selfishly, I may confess that the motor car has wrought me more loss than gain, for no longer have I all the spreading beauties of the distant country-side to myself; the luxury of loitering on the road is disturbed by the rushing past of the car with the trail of dust it leaves behind; the delightful illusion of remoteness is effectually destroyed, no longer do I feel miles from anywhere, or far removed from civilisation. The lonely, way-side inn, too, has lost its ancient, dreamy loneliness; the almost certainty of finding quarters for the night therein is lessened by the possible previous arrival of a party of motorists who have secured all the available accommodation. Both the road and the inn have become more companionable, but to

the loss of their quietude. In one sense road travel has its interest enhanced; the erst-deserted highways (and byways to a lesser extent) are alive again with pleasure traffic, and many Englishmen are becoming more familiar with their Road-Books than with their Bradshaws.

We had arrived in Exeter by the chance of circumstances, for on leaving Nether Stowey we had not planned to go there—or to go anywhere else in particular for that matter. I do not say that such desultory travelling is always to be commended, though it commended itself to us, who were only in search of holiday relaxation, for it is a relief, at times, to have no plans to keep—or break; it sufficed us to be travelling and enjoying ourselves, always prepared, and hoping, for the unexpected. “There should be no inexorable route—for the chief charm of English travel is liberty of caprice; and whichever way you turn you are sure to find some peculiar beauty that will reward your quest.” So writes William Winter, the distinguished American Shakespearian scholar, who knows rural England possibly better than the majority of Englishmen do.

We “got away” from Exeter by the old coach road leading to Taunton; we did not deliberately select this road, but struck upon it accidentally after leaving the city by what we deemed to be the least crowded way out; we merely contentedly followed the line of the least friction and the least traffic! Having no programme this direction suited us as well as any other. It proved a fine road, broad, and smooth of surface, but a trifle dusty; a delight-

ful one to travel on, if only for the sake of the wide views, opening out in frequent succession, over the sunlit woods to the distant hills of fair Devon. That first portion of our stage was a revelation of lovely landscapes ; as a rule, I prefer the byway to the highway, but, in the present instance, we were not tempted to digress from the latter for many miles.

What a delightful thing's a turnpike road !
So smooth, so level, such a means of shaving
The earth as scarce the Eagle in the broad
Air can accomplish,

sings Byron, and the fastest speed on land then was the pace of a horse ! I wonder what he would have thought of the rushing motor car ?

The highway is for fast travelling, the lane for loitering ; but how seldom one finds the motorist loitering ! Indeed, during this journey whenever we pulled up in order to make a sketch, to take a photograph, or to enjoy the view, should a fellow-motorist chance to come along at the time, he would be sure to act the part of the good Samaritan, either by pulling up or by slowing down to ask if we needed help ; not only this, but once when we halted for a few minutes by the roadside, simply for the sake of a rest, two ladies driving past, each in turn politely stopped her carriage to inquire if we were in trouble, and to ask if she could be of any assistance. The first lady actually offered to drive back to a town, some four miles away, and to send us help from a garage there ; the other lady very kindly offered to take my wife with her to her

house, "close at hand," for afternoon tea, whilst I got the car in order. On another occasion, when we had stopped on the top of a hill just to admire an extensive panorama, a gentleman on horseback came along; he also promptly pulled up. "Broken down?" he exclaimed, "and just opposite my lodge gate. I'll send a man to help you to wheel the car into my drive. I'm going home to lunch, and I hope you will join me. There's no inn for miles." I am simply relating unvarnished facts, which, whilst showing how much unexpected kindness one experiences on the road, show also how seldom the motorist pulls up by the roadside for any purpose; otherwise, why should people always conclude, whenever we choose to stop purely for our own pleasure, that we were broken down? I have heard it said that a motorist never stops save he be thirsty or hungry; and, when I come to think of it, I cannot recall a single instance of coming upon a motor car pulled up by the roadside unless under the compulsion of mechanical or tyre trouble. Yet the great charm of road travel is surely the ability to call a halt at any interesting spot, and for as long as one chooses; therein, to my mind, lies the true enjoyment of touring. To rush at full speed from town to town, from hotel to hotel, with only "hurrygraphs" of the country passed through, may be exciting, but it is hardly a restful form of holiday-making; the old-time post-haste was leisurely in comparison, and when posting or coaching you had perforce a breathing space, every ten miles or so, whilst the horses were being changed.

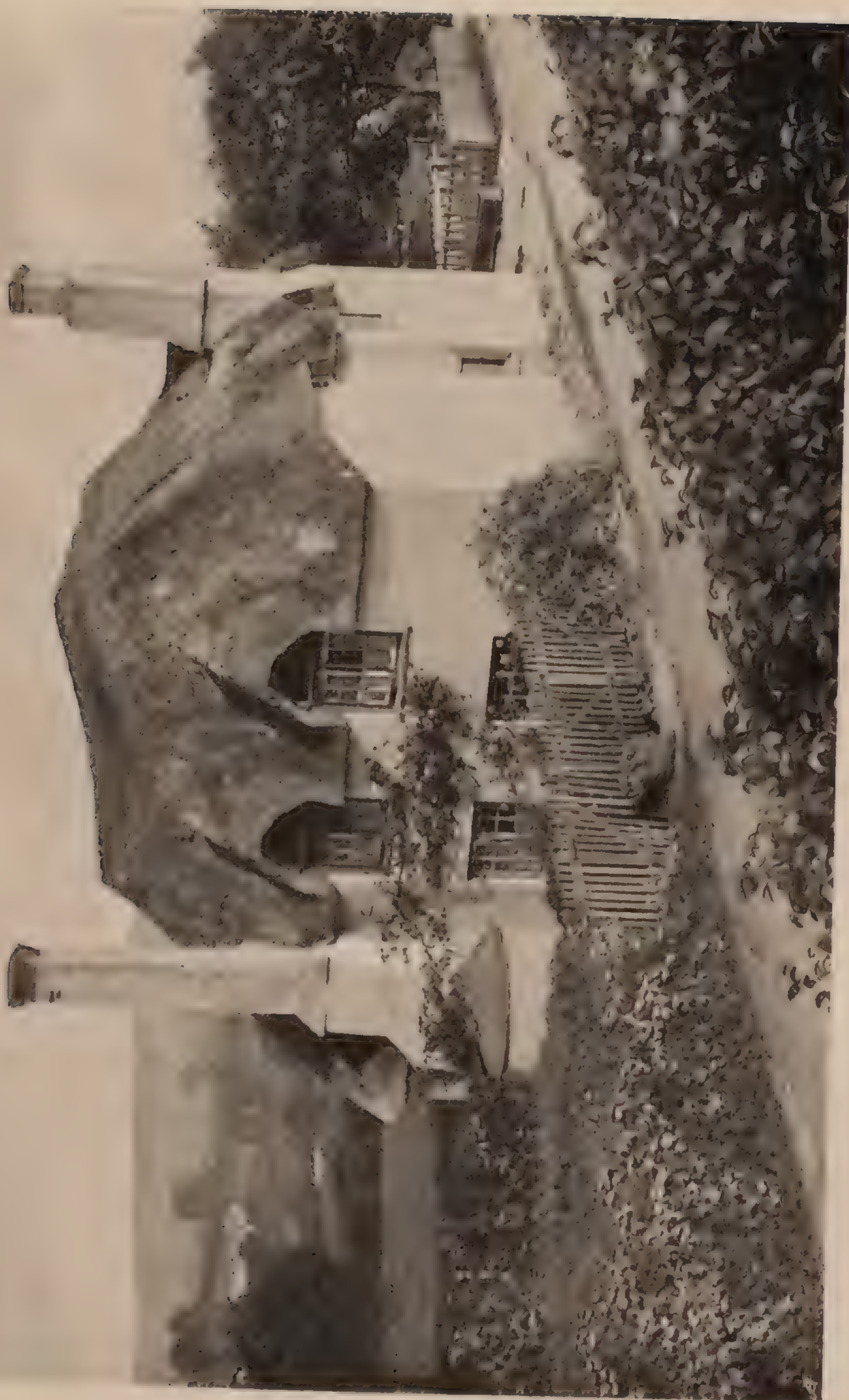
Some few miles from Exeter a pretty cottage by the wayside, with its thatched roof and clean-looking whitewashed walls, attracted our attention, not that it was prettier than other cottages we had passed, but because it showed plainly the round projection of the old-fashioned stone oven, that formerly was quite a familiar feature of the country cottage and of many a farm-house. These primitive ovens consist simply of a round or square enclosure built of stone or brick, with a flue at the top, and an iron door for access from within. A faggot is lighted in the oven and allowed to burn itself out, which causes the oven to be thoroughly and evenly heated, and therein lies its excellence; the ashes are then swept away, and the articles to be baked placed within. Now for baking bread, at any rate, this form of oven is simply perfect, for it is neither over- nor under-done, and never burnt. I have eaten bread so baked, made, moreover, from home-grown English wheat, ground in a local water-mill, and never have I tasted bread so excellent, so sweet, and so toothsome; at the end of a week the crumb of it was as soft to the touch and the flavour of it as good as on the first day of baking, not stale and insipid; but of the ordinary purchased loaf I cannot say the same. My experience was gained in a remote West-Country farm-house that I took one summer holiday, and the farmer's wife it was who made and baked the bread, and cooked much else besides excellently in that old-fashioned type of oven. "I could not use an ordinary range," said she, "it spoils everything." The cakes she

made for us, and the home-cured bacon and ham we had for breakfast, how delicious they were!

Mr. Albert Pell, in his reminiscences, remarks of bread baked in this good and wholesome old-fashioned way, "The bread was nutritious and infinitely better than the white, sapless, thin slices cut nowadays off some scientifically prepared loaf. In the thirties one got a 'hunch' off a huge, bulging loaf, with the mark on its base of the bricks on which it was baked, and with the healthy smell of the wood-heated oven from which it had been drawn. The crust was neither tough nor rocky, but crisp and fragrant."

Cooking has become almost a lost art in England; yet, according to Macaulay, confirmed by Dr. Johnson and numerous other writers, at the old English tavern "the very choicest cookery obtained." In Queen Elizabeth's days William Harrison declared that "there is nothing on the Continent to compare with the plenty and comfort of our great English hostelries; nowhere is there such cooking, such excellent food." Nowadays, alas, the conditions are reversed, though, of late, matters are improving, for I know of a few old country inns where the fare, though simple, is of the best, and you may enjoy the wine without the dread of gout.

We took a photograph of that old cottage, here reproduced, showing the old-fashioned primitive oven projecting externally and roofed over with stone slats. It may be observed just below the chimney to the left of the building. Some day, perchance, like many another, it will be improved



A DEVON COTTAGE.

away, and a modern, more economical, less troublesome but food-spoiling range established in its place. Indigestion is to-day a common complaint; I believe that the modern range and indifferent cooking have much to do with the evil. There is a proverb that runs, "God sends us meat, the devil sends us cooks"; and I should like to add cooking-ranges!

A curious incident was related to us in connection with one of these ovens wherein a certain country baker baked his bread contentedly for years, and to the satisfaction of his customers, as his father had done before him. It appears, however, that at one period occasionally a loaf was delivered bearing on the bottom of it the strange legend, "Aged 69." Now, that any baker should brand his bread as sixty-nine years old is an incomprehensible thing, unless, as the village gossips whispered, "the man must have gone mad"! Eventually the mystery was solved. The oven had been repaired by the local mason, who had mended the floor with a portion of a gravestone that had been broken in two, but leaving "Aged 69" thereon. It happened, as a matter of course, that now and then a loaf was baked over the spot where that word and those figures were, and thus had them impressed upon it. But how came it about that the mason appropriated a gravestone for the repairs, I wonder?

I have actually had old memorial brasses, manifestly torn from their places in country churches, offered to me for sale by curiosity dealers. I really think such transactions should be made illegal; only last year I was offered "two fine brasses (fifteenth

century) of a knight and his lady, supposed to have come from a church at Norfolk"! At the same time, not all "ancient" brasses in the hands of the dealers are thus obtained, for I chance to know that there is a manufactory on the Continent of such things, besides of ancient armour, and antique furniture, etc. Many of these articles, I have been given to understand, are "picked up" by wealthy American curio-seekers, at big prices, to enrich their collections—the demand has created the supply.

Though I consider myself a fair judge of old things, I was taken in by one of these pseudo-antiques that I innocently purchased at a village country shop on the road; in this case it was a sun-dial, dated 1620, skilfully engraved, and with a look of age given to it by some trick of the trade, so that it might easily have deceived a more experienced man than myself. My first suspicions of a fraud were aroused when, on returning home, I placed it in a correct position on a pedestal in my garden, and then discovered by the shadow thrown on the dial that the manufacturer of it had placed the figures in the reverse direction to what they should be, so that at 3 P.M. the shadow thrown by the gnomon showed 9 A.M. The forger had not been sufficiently careful of such a minor detail as placing his figures aright. Thereupon a closer inspection revealed the fact that I had been taken in by an exceedingly clever fraud. Now comes a curious coincidence: shortly afterwards I was dining with an antiquarian friend, and he showed me a very clever imitation of an old Toby jug that he had

bought in a little village curiosity shop, believing at the time it was a genuine article. It turned out that the shop and the village were the very same in which I had purchased my sun-dial! My friend had no suspicion of anything wrong until one day he revisited that shop in search of further "finds," when he discovered an exact replica of the jug he had bought there, displayed in the same window; upon making inquiries of a local collector he managed to elicit the fact that that honest curio-dealer had sold a number of those jugs of precisely the same pattern, and as fast as one was sold another took its place. Needless to add those jugs were all modern imitations of the old. Now that motorists penetrate everywhere, and so many travellers are on the outlook for curios, the village curiosity shop oftentimes does a good trade, for who would suspect the simple village shopkeeper! I am afraid that the trade in sham antiques is both a flourishing and a profitable one. I was told by an American gentleman I met at a country inn, who was touring with his wife through England in a motor car, that his wife had purchased quite a quantity of "delightful old things" on the road in out-of-the-way places and packed them off home. "England is a regular museum," he remarked to me. "I wonder where all the old things come from, especially considering the quantity of them we Americans ship over to our new country year after year; what a wealth of them there must have been."

It was a fair landscape of open views, rather than

of subtle peeps, we passed through that sunny morning. A landscape of broad effects, with a ribbon of dusty road ahead of us, threading its white way through the green fields and spreading woods, in long lessening lines, to the blue distance—a tantalising distance, ever beckoning us on, and ever receding as we progressed. Alas, one can never overtake the horizon; it always remains the land of mystery, where one fain would be! Why is it, I wonder, that there is always such a fascination in the far-away, that that which is the most difficult of access is the most prized, that the unattainable always seems the most desirable? Were it otherwise, so many moralists would not have commented on the fact. Wherein lies the glamour of distance? Possibly it is due to the circumstance that we see things not as they actually are, but through our poetic imaginations. There was a time when the world seemed much larger and less commonplace than it does now, a time when even Cornwall had a far-off sound, and the castle-crowned crag of Tintagel was a spot to dream about rather than to be seen, so remote and inaccessible it appeared in those past days, when men made their wills before taking any long journey. Thanks to the railway, the steamboat, and the motor car, our mastery over distance has vastly increased since then, and romance and poetry retire before accessibility! Only the distant horizon evades us!

Somehow our road struck us as possessing a purposeful look, a something not easy to define. It suggested the spirit of travel, as though it set out

to reach a definite and far-away destination, and had nothing to do with local convenience or loitering, and, when we came to think of it, we remembered that it formed part of the longest highway in Britain, the one that leads from the Land's End to John-o'-Groat's.

Without a further stop we reached Taunton, where we exchanged the main road for the less-travelled and more enjoyable byway, and set forth in search of Enmore, a little secluded Quantock village, having suddenly remembered that we had promised to pay the rector there a visit, should our car ever take us in his part of the world. Taunton, like many another ancient town, is fast losing its quaintness and individuality. It has tramways, the electric light, plate-glass shop windows, with other unpicturesque modern conveniences, and just a suspicion of hurry in the walk of its citizens; it no longer strikes one as a leisured town where men have time to take life easily. Taunton looks as though it considered itself a place of some importance in the world. At one time, however, according to a local couplet,

When Taunton was a furzy down,
Norton was a walled town.

Now Norton is unknown to fame, and Taunton looms large, prosperous, and progressive.

Soon after Taunton we came once more in sight of the wooded Quantocks bathed in soft sunshine, hills that greeted us with a friendly, familiar look, although we had only become acquainted with them

so short a time ago. There is a certain class of scenery that possesses this quality of welcoming a stranger, and of making him feel forthwith at home amidst fresh surroundings ; but it belongs only to beautiful and unsophisticated scenery that somehow, at times, has a mysterious influence on the mind. Wordsworth felt this of the Quantocks upon first seeing them. I think that the great charm of the Quantocks is, if I may be allowed the expression, that they are essentially companionable ; even their solitude is a cheerful solitude, so they quickly gain your affection, and, having gained it, will not let it go again. This rapport between man and nature under certain aspects is purely sentimental ; nevertheless it exists, and no one can say exactly why or how. Some things are too subtle for analysis ; you might as well endeavour, by vivisection, to probe the secret of the skylark's song !

So driving on towards the hills we presently found ourselves in Enmore. A glance at our map showed us " Enmore Castle " marked thereon, which led us to expect an ancient feudal stronghold ; but, on finding our way to the spot, we discovered only an unromantic eighteenth-century mansion of no architectural beauty, though set in a pleasant and well-timbered park. We afterwards learnt that there had been a castle there owned by the Malet family from the Conquest down to the days of Charles II., and that one of the Malets held the Norman standard at the Battle of Hastings. Enmore church, like most of those in Somerset, that county of beautiful churches, possesses a fine

square tower, notable for the carved pinnacles that crown its staircase-turret. Within the building, which has been well restored and has a cared-for look, we found nothing of special interest. In this we were disappointed, as standing close to the erst feudal castle, we thought, perchance, that we might come upon the tomb of one of its earlier warrior lords, his armoured effigy recumbent thereon in sculptured marble or in alabaster,

With shield and crested head,
Sleeping proudly in the purple gloom
By the stain'd window shed,

—or at least a figured brass upon the floor. But if in this we were disappointed, we did discover something to remind us of the “brave days of old,” in the shape of two old helmets hung on the east wall of the nave. One of these still showed traces of gilt and colouring, and had its crest attached; the other was plain. Of the history of these helmets we could glean nothing, still they stirred our imaginations. Could those helmets but speak, what romance they might make known! If only all the relics of the past that our country churches once possessed in such rich wealth had been preserved, how much greater to-day would be their interest to the thoughtful traveller! In the churchyard we noticed the battered steps and broken shaft of an ancient cross. Then we set forth in search of the rectory, which turned out to be a mile or so away from the church, as many rectories strangely are, though for no good reason that I can fathom, unless it be to ensure the parson getting walking exercise

on Sundays! Luckily we found the rector at home, and a hearty welcome to a wholly unexpected guest was our good fortune. On the road we did not meet "our warmest welcome at an inn"!

That afternoon our host thoughtfully suggested a drive to Chedzoy to inspect the ancient and interesting church there, as it was but a few miles away in the moors (meaning Sedgemoor). He also mentioned an old and historic house in his parish, where Jane Seymour was reputed to have been born, that he would like to show us on our return. Here was a tempting afternoon's programme, the only set programme of our tour! So it happened that things of interest were brought to our notice without any searching for them on our part; all we did was to drive contentedly along, the rest came to us. Thus, without any thought of our road or of the morrow, without guide-book or plan, we proceeded on our pleasant pilgrimage, for freedom was the essence of our outing. We started out for nowhere in particular, nevertheless we managed to arrive at a good many places!

The wide, marshy waste known as Sedgemoor, with its deep and dark water dykes—they call these locally "rhines," a word I cannot find in my dictionary—is impressive in its damp, green dreariness; a vast level region that in winter-time often resembles a shallow sea. Sedgemoor has had fame forced upon it by the chance of circumstance, for there was fought the last real battle on English ground, and Chedzoy Church stands overlooking the battlefield; indeed, it was from the top of its

tall tower that one of Monmouth's spies, by the aid of a telescope, discovered the advance of the royal army. Other places have had fame bestowed upon them by the art of the novelist, and such fame seems to be as enduring as that of actual and eventful happenings. The novelist has this advantage, that he naturally selects his scenes with due regard to effect, whilst the makers of history have other things to do than to consider the stage-setting.

Chedzoy hamlet is a remote, out-of-the-world, forgotten spot, tested, that is, by the impression the place produces on the mind, and not by mere measured miles; for it is only three from busy Bridgwater, though for aught the eye can tell it might be a thousand from anywhere. So tranquil and dreamy is the spot, the very abode of peace, one can hardly realise that any important event ever took place there.

A few years before our arrival (in the year 1904, to be precise) a curious sale took place at Chedzoy, in accordance with a quaint local custom, when a piece of land, known as "Church Acre," was offered by auction. This land, it appears, was bequeathed in the year 1490 by a staunch churchman, "to be sold every twenty-one years, for a lease of twenty-one years, during the burning of half an inch of candle, the proceeds to be expended upon the church in such a manner as the rector and churchwardens for the time shall think fit." The sale-room, we learnt, was crowded, the "half an inch of candle" was lighted with due ceremony by the rector, and when it was at its last flicker a final

bid of £68 was made for the land, at which it was knocked down. I would that we had chanced upon that sale!

How quaint and picturesque many of these time-honoured customs are; they deserve to be maintained, for they are of more than local interest. As so many of these old customs have died out and been forgotten, I make no excuse for giving here particulars of two other somewhat similar survivals that came to our knowledge during a former tour. It is well to record such quaint customs before they disappear for ever. The first of these relates to the letting of land by candle-burning that prevails at the Gloucestershire village of South Cerney. There, as at Chedzoy, a candle is lighted, and, so long as it burns, bids for a certain plot of land are received and recorded, and when the light goes out the ownership of the lot, for the time, is decided. This is according to the will of an old inhabitant, one William Cutts, "who left certain freehold lands and cottages in trust to feoffees for the benefit of the parish of South Cerney. The property is directed to be put up to public competition every eight years, and the fate of each of the seven lots has to be determined by the life of an inch of candle."

Another curious, and somewhat different, method of letting land obtains at Bourne. There a certain "White Bread Meadow" is yearly offered by auction. "The auctioneer is stationed on the Queen's Bridge, and, as each bid for the field is made, a boy is started to run to a public-house and back again to the bridge. The person whose bid

is unchallenged when the last boy returns to the bridge is declared to be the tenant of the land for the ensuing year. From the income arising from the rent of the field, a cheese and onion supper is provided at the house to which the boys run. Two trustees are elected after the supper to receive the rent, and to distribute the surplus in white bread. Every house in that part of the town thereupon receives a four-pound loaf of white bread." This is in accordance, we understood, with the stipulations of an ancient will. Some of our ancestors truly held quaint and original ideas as to the manner of devising their charities; there was no dull uniformity about them, and possibly a good deal of intended picturesqueness. I wonder what would be thought of a modern bequest on such lines?

CHAPTER XI

An interesting old church—Sun-dials—A “tumble-down” stile—A fighting parson—An ancient home and its story—The right of pigeonry—An English Holland—A remote spot—Signposts and the new era of road travel—A gigantic maze—A lonely landscape—Berkeley Castle—The old-fashioned inn—The life of a feudal lord.

CHEDZOY Church, apart from its historical associations, is of much interest. In absence of the clerk, we were told that an old body in a cottage close by had the keys, and she proved to be an excellent guide, in so far that she was not given to prattling, therefore we were enabled to make our inspection undisturbed, though she was ready to answer any questions we put to her, as far as her knowledge prevailed, for which rare virtue we were duly grateful, even to the increasing of her tip upon our departure.

At the base of the south transept our guide pointed out two hollowed stones that formed part of the buttress. According to local tradition, these stones were worn thus by Monmouth's rustic followers, who sharpened their scythes and axes thereon just previous to the battle. Over the south porch we noticed a sun-dial, such as many ancient

churches still possess, and in a similar position. Possibly these were of some use in an age when neither watches nor clocks were to be depended upon, though even the sun-dial failed when the sun declined to shine; but generally once during the week the country folk could secure the right time by one. So to our rural forefathers the sun-dial was something more than the mere picturesque toy it has become to us to-day. Below the dial is the date 1597, possibly that of a former restoration. To the left of this are the initials H. P. (belonging to some one now forgotten, but doubtless formerly an important personage); to the right are the initials R. B., being those, we were informed by our clerical friend, of Richard Beere, the then Abbot of Glastonbury; and in the centre, below, the initials R. F. have place, being intended for Richard Fox, one time Bishop of Winchester.

Entering the church, a few steps beyond the porch we noticed on the floor a very fine brass—by guess, of the early fifteenth century—showing a knight in armour with a sword by his side. Unfortunately, the inscription of this has wholly disappeared, so who the brave knight was—I take it on faith that all ancient knights were brave—or where he lived, or what he did, or where, or when, or how he died, we could not tell. His name is forgotten, only his likeness, if likeness it be, on brass remains. All the old body knew about it was that it had been there as long as she could remember, which was not very enlightening. It struck us as rather strange, especially in the absence of any

other notable monument or brass to take up room, to find this knightly memorial have its place so close to the doorway, a position which, of old, was not considered an especially favourable spot of sepulchre, as it was trodden over by every worshipper. Noblemen and warriors almost universally, if space permitted, were placed to rest in the chancel before the high altar. As the epitaph, which, though much quoted, will bear quoting again, to a humble yeoman in the church of Kingsbridge, in Devon, expresses it—

Here lie I, by the porch door,
Here lie I, because I'm poor ;
The further in, the more to pay,
Yet here lie I as warm as they.

We presumed that this brass had possibly been removed, during some restoration, from another and more worthy position in the chancel—not that it matters much, except for sentiment, where a man lies after he is dead ; unfortunately, we have found such removals of monuments and brasses to be no uncommon thing.

On many a stately and ancient monument to the dead, the simple announcement, “ Here lyeth,” “ Here doth lye,” etc., now is made to tell a falsehood, for many a monument has been removed far away from the spot where the remains of those it commemorates are taking their long, last sleep. Only the other day I was looking over an old church, when I observed an elaborate marble altar-tomb set in an unusual position against the west wall of the nave, in an out-of-the-way corner. The

inscription, directly below a recumbent alabaster effigy thereon, began, "Here lyeth." I had not read further when the grey-haired vicar entered the church, and, observing that I was interested in the monument, approached me, and remarked, with quite a proper clerical smile, "That inscription was true once, but it is so no longer, for the gallant warrior lies comfortably in the chancel, only his monument took up so much room there I was obliged to have it removed." Why obliged? I wondered. The worthy vicar saw no wrong in this removal; indeed, he appeared to consider it a very commendable proceeding, and I noticed later on that the chancel floor was covered with modern Minton tiles (worthy of a builder's "desirable villa"), which the vicar looked upon admiringly. All I ventured to remark was that they looked bright and new, and the church looked very ancient. Architecturally, "you cannot put new wine into old bottles" successfully, for the new does not harmonise with the old, nor has it any meaning to the grieved antiquary. O restoration, "how many sins are committed in thy name"!

Perhaps the most interesting thing in Chedzoy Church is the splendidly embroidered altar frontal, made from a wonderfully fine old priest's cope. This cope was discovered beneath the pulpit, where it had lain hidden away for close upon three centuries. More than this of the history of that cope we could not unearth, suggestive though the discovery was. The bench ends, too, are noteworthy, being beautifully carved by the old monks

of Glastonbury, and are in an excellent state of preservation. One of these displays the letter M, with a crown above, a tudor rose on one side, and the date 1559 on the other. This, we were told, was intended for Queen Mary; the crowned M is certainly suggestive of her, but the date 1559 is somewhat puzzling, as Elizabeth was reigning then. Another bench end, below a carved knot, has the initials R. B., and was the seat of Richard Beere, Abbot of Glastonbury, whose initials we noticed cut in the stone above the porch. The church besides contains a large squint, a holy-water stoup, a sedilia, and a double piscina, and the stone steps and doorway to the rood-loft still remain. Over the centre of an arch to the left of the nave we also noticed a much-mutilated carving of the crucifixion. This had manifestly been done in bold relief, but at some later period had been chiselled down flat with the wall, and possibly plastered over as a superstitious thing. Chedzoy Church is certainly of considerable interest, and well repays a leisurely visit, for it tells a tale of the days gone by, though it tells that tale in stone!

When we had finished our inspection the old body suddenly exclaimed, "Now I will show you something of real interest," as though the church was of secondary importance to what was coming; then she led the way through the churchyard to a spot where an open space in the boundary wall was apparently fenced across by some wooden rails and three upright posts; beyond this was a footpath across the fields. "There!" she said, "that's what

we call a tumble-down stile. I don't expect you have ever seen one before. Strange folk, who don't know how to use it, put their feet on the bars to climb over natural like, then the bars give way, and the folk tumble down. Lots of strangers have tumbled down trying to climb over it." Before us were four rails stretched across the open space at the usual height of a gate, or a fence, and our guide, placing her hand on the topmost rail at one end, pushed it easily down with the others below and stepped over them. Upon a close examination we discovered that the four bars moved on pivots placed in the middle upright post, the bars being weighted at one end to keep them in a horizontal position when not purposely pushed down. Truly a quaint, uncommon, and somewhat complicated sort of stile, though simple enough to use to any one unacquainted with the working of it. A novice, however, who essays to climb over it, which appears the natural thing to do, is nearly always thrown down, as already mentioned, owing to the bars unexpectedly giving way under his feet, and that, as the old body exclaimed, "is the joke of it." I verily believe that she would have greatly rejoiced had a stranger chanced to come along that day and tumbled at the stile, but, as she explained, half apologetically it seemed to us, "strangers be scarce in this part of the world; it bain't no good waiting for one." Certainly we had never seen a stile like it before, though there are a few similar ones scattered about the country, a good specimen being in the deer-park near Stratford-on-Avon.

Remounting the car we next returned to Enmore, passing through the parish of Durleigh on the way, where four trees were pointed out to us in a field, from which trees, the country folk declare, four of Monmouth's unfortunate followers were hanged by order of Judge Jeffreys, whose name is still remembered and detested in these parts, and this in spite of all the long years that have passed since his day. A surprising fact surely, but Somerset folk appear to have retentive memories. "The curse of Jeffreys be upon you," has still a meaning to them, whilst in other parts of the West Country, where he held his courts, the very name of the infamous judge is clean forgotten, and if you mentioned it to the rural folk they would look at you in wonderment, not knowing who he was or why you spoke of him. But it is not so, according to our experience, in this corner of Somerset. Indeed, during our short sojourn there we had pointed out to us two other places where the luckless victims of that judge were said to have been hanged.

Somehow when the simple country folk told us of these far-off tragedies, it seemed to make the past more real, and bring us nearer to it. Of course we had to take the stories and the trees on faith, but that the rural folk believed in them we had no doubt. The trees must certainly have been very old, were they really standing in Jeffreys' time; possibly they are the successors of the original ones, and doing show duty in their place. It is a quality of a true-born Somerset man, we were informed, "never to forget a kindness, and never to forgive a wrong."



WEST BOWER.

Also we were further informed that, like his Devon brother, he is a good fighter; that he was so badly beaten at Sedgemoor was not due to want of bravery on his part, but to want of proper weapons and good generalship. Even the Somerset parson of old was not always superior to his flock in this respect. Indeed, Hannah More, writing from Somerset to a friend, remarked of one of them, "He is intoxicated about six times a week, and very frequently is prevented from preaching by two black eyes, honestly earned by hard fighting"!

Shortly before reaching the rectory at Enmore our host pointed out to us the old house of West Bower, where, as already mentioned, local tradition has it that Jane Seymour was born, but whether this tradition has any foundation in fact I cannot say. Though now only a pleasant farmstead, in its day it appears to have been a place of considerable importance and extent; much of the old building has been pulled down, and now only a quaint fragment of it remains in the shape of two turrets and some ancient walls, but these turrets, with their rounded mullioned windows and gargoyles above, are curious and noteworthy, and show originality of design. The two turrets flank the doorway with its old oak door that still possesses its ancient drop-handles of iron. The left-hand turret contains a circular stone stairway lighted by one of the windows at the top, which window contains much of its original and beautiful stained glass, and above the windows are carved shields. Beyond this, and some arched and moulded doorways of stone, the

house within has been so modernised as to have lost the charm of ancientness. The tenant told us that when digging in his garden he frequently came upon the foundations of the portions of the house that have disappeared, and when he pointed out to us the position of these we realised the size and consequence of the original building. It is strange how so presumably stately a mansion should have fallen into decay and have disappeared, save the unimportant, though interesting, fragment now remaining, without leaving any story or tradition behind, apart from that already mentioned.

At the end of the garden still stands the original pigeon-cote, or columbarium; this is circular in shape and of considerable size, having about nine hundred nesting niches. The uncommon feature of this exceptionally large cote is that it is built entirely of mud, the mud walls being nearly four feet in thickness, and it has a thatched roof. Mud and thatch do not appear very enduring materials to build with; nevertheless this ancient cote, probably coeval with the house, has outlasted all but a small part of it, possibly because mud was not worth carting away to build with. The existence of this pigeon-cote proves the old mansion to have been a manor-house of importance, for in the mediæval age, if a learned antiquary informed me aright, no lesser personage than a bishop, a prior, or a lord of the manor had the right of pigeonry.

Enmore, according to our host, possesses one of the earliest, if not the earliest, village elementary schools established in the kingdom. This was

founded by Tom Poole, the friend of Coleridge, in order to teach the children "writing, reading, arithmetick, and grammar." Poole was very fond of visiting his cousins at Enmore, one of whom became rector of the parish, and in a letter to a friend Coleridge jestingly complains that he could never start forth for a long country ramble with Poole, no matter for where they set out, but that they were certain eventually to turn up at Enmore. Respecting these indirect rambles Coleridge wrote some joking lines, which I quote from *The Quantock Hills*, by B. F. Creswell:—

Lest after this life it should prove my sad story,
That my soul must needs go to the Pope's Purgatory,
Many prayers have I sighed, may Tom Poole be my guide,
For so often he'll halt, and so lead me about,
That ere we get there, through earth, sea, or air,
The last day will have come, and the fires be put out!

As I sat chatting that evening with my host in the old rectory at Enmore, smoking a last contemplative pipe, I felt it was more than probable that Coleridge, with his friend, had also sat in that very chamber, and the thought hallowed it. I was surrounded by something more than four square walls; a past presence seemed to linger within them, for, as Agesilaus of old said, "Men grace places." To the meditative traveller the association of a place with an illustrious name must inevitably sanctify it. Truly in this case the association had no certainty, but the probability was so great, that, being in a credulous mood, I welcomed the probability as a certainty. There are many accepted

historical "facts" based upon no more sure a foundation.

A hasty glance at our map, before leaving Enmore, decided us to drive from there northwards, making for Clifton, where we proposed to cross the Avon, and thereafter to stop the night at the first place we came to that took our fancy; further than this we did not trouble about our route. We had to pass through Bridgwater again, and beyond that tedious town we struck upon a long, level, low-lying tract of country, through which our road led us for many monotonous, yet not wearisome, miles. Coleridge, who knew the district, called it "as flat as Holland," and the Dutch-like prospect found no favour in his eyes; indeed, he frankly confessed, in a letter to his friend Poole, that he "did not care a rush for it." Such scenery has gone out of fashion, though, at one time, a flat open country was in favour and mountain scenery was considered gloomy and depressing, but hills and mountains have been the vogue since Scott first, and Wordsworth afterwards, with Ruskin later, revealed their beauties in song and prose. Still to-day there are a cultured few who dare to prefer the drowsy quaintness of Holland to the more assertive scenery of Switzerland.

A level landscape has its own peculiar charms, having nothing belonging to earth, except a tree or lowly cottage, to interrupt the vast dome of sky above that floods it with cheerful light, and light of itself is a most inspiriting thing; the wind wanders over the plain unrestrained and greets the traveller thereon with its refreshing embrace, the

eye, too, ranges over it unchecked and revels in the sense of unlimited space, and these things oftentimes afford the traveller unconscious pleasure. All around us was a wide expanse of greenery fading away into a sea-like horizon of circling blue, where the world seemed to end!

A deep tranquillity reigns over such landscapes; and across them mighty gleams of golden sunshine and grey, cool shadows follow one another in swift or slow succession according to the weather, giving a feeling of life and movement to the prospect; the plain is a region of mighty distances, of sluggish, reflecting waterways that bring down bits of the bright sky into the dull green earth; its inhabitants, as a rule, are slow of thought and slow of movement, for they live in a lazy land, where nothing seems to hurry but, occasionally, the wind—a land of wonderful sunrises and sunsets, for, beheld through the low-lying, moist atmosphere, the sun thereon mostly rises or sets in a riot of colour, in a glory of melting rubies and gold! The plain is dominated by the sky, and, after all, if we could but realise it, the sky is more wonderful than the mountain, and the vast cloudscapes (if I may be allowed the term) of the plain are full of infinite change and beauty. But still, after all this saying, the plain itself, in time, becomes monotonous; you may drive upon it for miles, but the scene retains the same characteristics the whole of the way; it lacks the charm of variety, and variety is the crave of the age.

At last the long line of blue horizon in front of

us was broken by the misty outline of the Mendip hills—hills that rose boldly out of the ocean of greenery around, like land rising out of the sea that welcomes the sailor at the end of his voyage! The hills gave us promise of a change of scenery, and the sight of them stimulated our thoughts, for “a beyond implies discovery and affects the imagination.” It is always in the magic beyond that our hopes lie: in face of frequent disillusion our faith in its promises never wholly fails; we still trust to find there what we have never yet found. Against hope experience counts for little; romance is more attractive than hard fact, and were it not for its illusions life would hardly be bearable! Nothing, not even love, is more illusive than the fallacy that joy may be found in the far-away. *Cælum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt.*

Crossing the green and caverned Mendips we dipped down on their other side to a pleasantly undulating and well-wooded country. The landscape had a fresh look and a fresh charm; there is nothing like sharp contrasts to make one appreciate different classes of scenery, and there is no country in the world wherein you may obtain so much variety during a day's drive as in England. A little over an hour ago we were in a flat land that reminded us of Holland; next we were amongst the green hills breathing a lighter, different air; now we were in a purely pastoral country of rich meadows, leafy trees, and rambling farmsteads.

Finding by a finger-post that we were on the direct road to Bristol, and having no desire to

traverse the thronged and busy streets of that prosperous city, we took the first opportunity of turning to the left from off the highway, trusting, by changing our direction thus, to cross the Avon at Clifton. We chanced upon a shady winding lane, free from dust and free from traffic. If we keep to the west of the main road to Bristol we must turn up eventually at Clifton, we reasoned; to follow the devious lanes with any certainty by our map we found impossible, so we steered by compass as well as we could. When you are nearing a large city or town it is not so simple to avoid entering it as one might imagine, for all the roads seem to centre thereon as do the spokes of a wheel to its hub. Now, to Clifton there appeared to be only one road; to Bristol there were many.

After a few miles of lonely wandering we came to a level railway crossing, but without the protection of a gate of any kind, though there was a notice-board, prominently placed, bidding travellers "Beware of the Trains." But the notice-board would not avail at night! Perhaps the trains do not run after dark! It was open to any stray cattle on the road to get on to the line, for there was nothing to hinder them so doing. Such level crossings are usual in America, where one is prepared for them, and where, by the way, the locomotives are provided with "cow-catchers," but in England I have never, before, come upon anything of the kind. Presumably there was not much traffic on the road or the rail, yet the rails looked bright as though well used.

Shortly after this we found ourselves in a grey, old-world village, with a fine, ancient, and much weather-worn cross in its centre. Indeed, the whole village had an ancient Elizabethan look; it was as though, by some magic, we had been suddenly transported back into those "spacious days" of good Queen Bess. The village came upon us as a delightful surprise, one of the unexpected incidents of the road that charm the more because so unexpected. When you are prepared beforehand by a guide-book for what you are going to see, you may easily be led to expect too much, and the reality proves a disappointment; the true enjoyment of travel lies in being your own discoverer. Now, deliberate sight-seeing by the aid of a guide-book defeats this end; it effectually robs one of the stimulus of surprise, and the innocent personal pride and pleasure one takes in places one discovers unaided for oneself. In the village we noticed also a curious fifteenth-century priest's house with a quaint stone porch of the same period. Sentiment has much to do with our appreciation of antiquity, and, possibly, this sentimental love of things old caused Congresbury—for that, we learnt, was the name of the village—to appeal to us in the way it did. To some it might merely seem grey and worn, out of date, and of small or no interest; our impression of a place is much a matter of sentiment and seeing, and to some extent of the mood of the moment, for it must be borne in mind that the charm of a spot lies, after all, in the eyes of the observer. To the dullard all things are dull.

At Congresbury we sought directions as to the road to Clifton. These were given us with much civility and circumlocution, though with little clearness; but when a road is winding and involved, it is not easy to direct a stranger rightly thereon. So we drove away, trusting to the signposts, but not one inscribed "To Clifton" did we see. Now that the revival of road traffic is an accomplished fact, I think that our roads need a more efficient and a more complete system of signposting. At present, signposts are apt to be too local in their information, frequently only pointing the way to places near at hand and of small importance, which information is useless to the through traveller, and the through traveller is making much use of the old roads again, for to the independent motorist a hundred miles' run or more is but a pleasant day's journey when using his car for the purpose of getting from one place to another. Another provoking thing about the matter is that in certain seasons we have found, over a considerable area of country, the arms of the posts to be painted white all over, thus obliterating the inscriptions upon them; this, of course, is only done preparatory and temporarily to the repainting of the lettering; nevertheless, it is very disconcerting, not to say temper-trying, to the stranger who desires to learn the way to find all the signposts, in the section of the country he is traversing, off duty for a time. Respecting this repainting of signposts, a rather comical story was told by a gentleman I met during our tour, and he vouched for its strict authenticity. It appears that

over a certain extent of road, amounting to about twenty miles, if my memory serves me correctly, a man, new to the locality, was employed to reletter all the signposts. The signposts were numbered in due order on a sheet of paper, and the directions he was to paint on each post were plainly given under each number, but for some unexplained reason the man innocently began at the wrong end of the list, or the road, to the confusion of everybody!

Eventually, in spite of all our pains, we found ourselves in Bedminster, a suburb of Bristol; as we did not feel inclined to go back, there was nothing for it but to go forward, and to follow the tram-lines into the city; and it took us over an hour's tedious driving to get through it. What with the rushing trams that followed one another in rapid succession, thus practically monopolising the middle of the road, the numerous big lorries, carts, and conveyances pulled up on the side of it, thus taking up much of the rest of the space, our progress was not an easy or a pleasant one; moreover, we did not know our way, so we had frequently to stop and ask it, and, as we had no idea where we were going beyond Bristol, it was a perplexing matter how to put the query! Bristol was to us a gigantic maze, but at last we managed to get out of it and on to a road leading northwards; not that it mattered to us much which way the road led so long as we reached the open country again. That passing through Bristol was the one and only unpleasant experience of our journey. I do not think I was ever so

glad to get out of any place before. Bristol, I am told, used to be rather a quaint city, possessed of many picturesque old houses, but, from what we saw of it, I should imagine that it has improved its ancient picturesqueness entirely away. It is an unfortunate circumstance, but prosperity and picturesqueness never seem to dwell together!

Beyond Bristol we struck upon an elevated and open stretch of country, a country of bracing airs and wide prospects, a country generous in sunshine; below us to the west we caught occasional peeps of the silvery Severn winding its gleaming way to the sea, and no landscape with a visible river gliding through it can be dull, for flowing water lightens up the country-side as the eye lightens up the human face; and over the river, in the mystic far-away, we could just glimpse the dim outlines of the wild Welsh hills, looking as unsubstantial as the clouds above them. The country seemed to us very beautiful, but after the sudden contrast with the busy, smoky Bristol any country would have looked beautiful, not that Bristol is more smoky than most manufacturing towns; indeed, I think it is less so, and it is certainly less ugly than the majority, still even over Bristol there broods a canopy of smoke that glooms the blue sky above, greys the buildings around, and devitalises the air. Now, in the country the sky is a pure blue, not the deep ultramarine of Italy truly, but of an azure tint that, did we only realise it, is much more beautiful, whilst the light, clear country atmosphere stimulates one with its purity. The country is clean, the big

town, on account of its smoke alone, cannot help being more or less dirty.

Driving on we kept a good look-out for any inviting wayside inn, but we looked in vain for many miles. The district was thinly inhabited, and the houses on the way were few, but the landscape did not suffer by their absence; the bright sky above and the green earth below amply sufficed us. Just as we were wondering where we should eventually arrive, we observed in the hedgerow a large signboard standing in solitary state and inscribed, "Third turning to the left for the Berkeley Arms Hotel." Just that and nothing else. "We may as well go and see what the Berkeley Arms hotel is like," I exclaimed; "perhaps it is an angler's haunt by the river-side; if so, we may be in clover to-night." So we took the turning without more ado, and proceeded along a shady country lane for perhaps a couple of miles, when before us we espied, "bosomed high in tufted trees," the grey, time-worn, and buttressed walls of an ancient castle, with a massive rounded keep towering dark and solemn over all. Coming wholly unexpectedly upon this old feudal stronghold, set away in this quiet corner of England, gave us a delightful thrill of pleasure. Dusky and grim it looked with the weight of tragic history and of past centuries upon it—for this was Berkeley castle! It was both a picture and a romance in stone, and just beyond we caught a glimpse of the irregular red roofs of a tiny town, whither we went in search of the hotel. This proved to be a relic of the old coaching days—a

long plain building without any pretence of being picturesque, a building with a large arched entrance in its centre leading to the stable-yard, as was the custom of the time—and a very good custom in some respects, for the road traveller could alight, at his ease and leisure, under the archway protected from rain, and out of the way of loafers or of curious onlookers. To realise the comfort and convenience of this good old-fashioned arrangement, one need only arrive at the front door of a modern hotel in a downpour of rain, where you have to dismount from your car or carriage in the wet, and after a wait to secure rooms, your baggage is brought in moist and dripping, whilst the seats of your conveyance are getting damp and possibly sodden. If properly clad and waterproofed you can drive along quite comfortably, even enjoyably, in the rain, rain it ever so hard, but it is when dismounting, in the absence of shelter, that the trouble comes; do what you will, under those circumstances you always get wet, and your seats get damp.

On inquiry we learnt that we could see over the castle the next morning, but not that afternoon; so, though we had still some hours of daylight left, we elected to stop the night at the inn: there was no trouble about securing accommodation, for we were the only guests at the moment! "Berkeley is not a busy place," explained the maid who waited upon us, "but now and then we get a party staying here: only last week we had a party with a motor car," and she related this circumstance as though it were quite an event! "Yes, you can see over the castle

in the morning, but I don't think it's much worth seeing, for they don't show you the drawing-rooms or the other rooms occupied by the family, and they do say as how these be beautifully furnished ; they only show you the musty and fusty parts " !

In the coffee-room we discovered an old local handbook, with which, during the evening, we refreshed our rusty history of Berkeley Castle and its grim tragedy ; though, had we known it, we need not have taken the trouble, for the maid who did duty as a guide over the castle had the history of it, and the events that took place there, by heart, and a very intelligent guide she proved to be ; I really think, in this respect, a woman is better than a man, for she is more careful of her facts and less given to romancing. Berkeley Castle is one of the few feudal fortresses still inhabited, and, apart from its history and associations, is of interest owing to the interior being so well preserved that one is enabled to picture therefrom something of the life and the surroundings of a medieval lord, who appears to me to have lived a life of much pomp and show, but of infinitely less comfort than that of the average tenant of a modern suburban villa ! I could imagine the latter living in an ancient castle under ancient conditions, occupying the best chambers reserved for " my lord," bitterly complaining of the draughts—little wonder that four-posters with curtains drawn closely around them were in vogue,—of the smoky chimneys, of the damp and dark passages and cold open stairways of stone, of the absence of a proper bathroom and of a service of hot water over the

building, the poor lights of the flickering lamps, and of many other things. Why, life in a suburban villa is in comparison one of luxury. "The good old times" are very delightful to those who have not lived in them!

CHAPTER XII

“ God’s wayside inns ”—A curiously placed church tower—In search of epitaphs—“ The Earl of Suffolk’s fool ”—Berkeley Castle—Houses with traditions—Guides—The making of history—Relics—A curious conceit in a sun-dial—An historic chamber—A gruesome tragedy—The view from Berkeley Castle’s keep—A romance in stone.

As we had some hours of daylight left, the difficult thing was to know what to do with them. The homely and tiny town of Berkeley did not take long to explore, for, in truth, you can walk all over it in about a quarter of an hour ; indeed, we were told that its population totalled under a thousand, and possibly it was never any more. Berkeley has had fame and a familiar name thrust upon it because of its castle : without its castle I doubt if it would ever have existed. It is strange that so ancient, historic, and unprogressive a town should have preserved so little of its antiquity, for though most of its houses are old, they are only moderately so, and not one could honestly be termed picturesque. The only building that mildly interested us was a corner shop, bearing the date of 1660 on its weather-stained front, the one dated building we observed, and one looking much older than any other ; but

even this has suffered alterations to the loss of nearly all its original beauty ; still some remnant of its former grace remains in the shape of a carved corner post, and bold supporting brackets to its projecting upper story,—bits of effective detail that the old-world craftsman delighted in, the legitimate decoration of honest and revealed construction. If only photography had happily been invented two centuries or so before it was, what interesting representations of our old towns might have been preserved to us as they were in the heyday of their picturesqueness and quaintness. Now and then the traveller in a country town comes upon a charming unspoilt specimen of an ancient gabled and half-timbered building, with its projecting upper story, its mullioned windows, its high-pitched roof, and big chimney stacks pleasantly breaking the skyline, and his eye delights to dwell upon it as upon a beautiful picture ; but only imagine a whole street of such houses as existed in the days gone by !

Finding but small entertainment in the drowsy old town, and not caring to rest at ease within our inn upon so fine a day, we somehow naturally gravitated towards the church, for the parish church is generally ages older than the oldest building of a town, and few there are wholly devoid of interest, or that have not some story to tell at least to the observant wanderer. “God’s wayside inns” our country churches have been called, but, alas, the doors thereof are but too frequently kept carefully locked, so that the weary pilgrim cannot enter them. “God’s garden,” our English country churchyard

has also been lovingly named, but did ever any one see such a neglected garden, unless it be deserted?

On rising ground, that comes between the castle and the town, stands Berkeley's ancient church, its detached tower being curiously placed right away from it at the other end of the spacious churchyard. Now, there are a few country churches with their towers set apart, but I have not yet come upon an instance where the separation is so wide, and notably so. The reason for this was, possibly, that the tower might not command the castle in case the latter was besieged at any time. It happened, indeed, that during the Civil War the church was occupied in force by the Royalist castle garrison as an advanced outwork, lest it should be seized by the Parliamentarians, and used by them as a point of vantage from which to attack the keep. To this day the big west doors of the church bear witness of the struggle, having numerous bullet marks thereon. I almost think, from what we saw, that some of the bullets still remain embedded therein, graphic reminders of an almost forgotten fight.

Wandering about the churchyard we noticed many an ancient tombstone, its inscription wasting, or wasted away, or hidden by creeping moss or clinging lichen. But we were not epitaph-hunting, so we did not resent the inevitable result of Time's handiwork when left to work his will. Old Mortality is dead, and no one has succeeded him!

At head and foot a rough-hewn stone,
O'er which the herald-lichens trace
The blazon of oblivion

was all that marked the last resting-place of most of the humble dead, and sometimes only a grass-grown, unnamed mound. But there were other more enduring monuments whereon Time had not, or only partially, effaced the old-time epitaphs, some of which are so dear to the heart of the antiquary. One of these attracted our attention because of its well-preserved and quaintly lettered inscription, still plainly to be deciphered, though the tomb bore the date of 1665. Many is the long day since we have come upon any distinctively quaint or interesting epitaph—out of a book—but here at last we discovered a worthy one. It even forced itself upon our notice; we did not go in search of it! This struck us as being considerably above the average of tombstone versification, and here it is:—

Thomas Peirce

Five times Major ¹ of this Towne

Died Feb. 25. 1665. Aged 77.

Here Lyeth Thomas peirce, whom no man taught
 Yet he in Iron Brasse and Silver wrought
 He Jacks, and Clocks, and Watches (with Art) made
 And mended too, when others worke did fade
 Of Berkeley five times Major this Artist was
 And yet this Major, this Artist was but grasse,
 When his owne Watch was Downe on the last Day
 He that made Watches had not made A Key
 To winde it Up, but Useless it must lie
 Untill he Rise Againe no more to die.

As we were carefully copying this curious inscription an old woman made her presence felt as

¹ "Major" is presumably intended for mayor.

she watched us, and when we had finished she remarked, "That be a funny wording; I often read it, it amuses me, that it do." It struck us as rather a novel thing for any one to come to a churchyard to be amused; then she went on, "There be other funny ones in the churchyard." This was both unexpected and welcome news to us, for we had almost given up our search after quaint epitaphs as a vain proceeding. "Yonder," she continued, whilst pointing a grimy finger indefinitely into space,—“yonder be a funny one to a fool.” “To a fool?” we queried. “Yes,” she responded, “I’ll show it you if you’ll come along with me”; and she promptly led the way, over the long, lank grass, treading unheedingly over the lowly graves to a square tomb, whereon we read:—

Here lies the Earl of Suffolk’s Fool
Men called him Dicky Pearce
His folly serv’d to make folks laugh
When wit and mirth were scarce.
Poor Dick, Alas! is dead and gone
What signifies to cry?
Dickys enough are still behind
To laugh at by and by.

Buried XVIII June MDCCXXVIII
Aged LXIII Years.

On the other side of the tomb is inscribed the following, briefly and to the point:—

My lord, that’s gone, made himself much sport of him.

As we were copying this, the old body suddenly

exclaimed, "I must go now and get my good man's tea ready; it don't do to keep him waiting, it makes him a bit cross like, otherwise he's not bad tempered for a man. I might have had a worse husband, and I might have had a better; but some unfortunate women ain't got one at all." And after these unsought-for confidences—the poor folk seem to take a strange delight at times in discussing their private affairs with any one they meet—the old body departed in some haste. I only trust her "good man" had not to wait for his tea, and that she did not get a scolding, for had it not been for her we might not have seen "poor Dicky's" tomb. Left to ourselves, we elected once again, and more hopefully than usual, to go in search of further curious epitaphs.

Epitaphs, unless quaint, seldom appeal to the average man; they make trist reading, and their trite and obvious morals are a trifle wearisome. Moreover, one feels—after perusing the fulsome praises of the underlying dead—some doubt, not as to the sincerity of the feelings that prompted them, but of their authenticity, for sentiment is not fact. If the fulsome praises of the dead be true, according to the vast majority of epitaphs, then without doubt our forefathers must have possessed every Christian virtue *in extenso*. But did they? If you appeal to history for confirmation, you appeal in vain—in truth, the appeal had better be left alone. Perhaps a pleasanter way of looking at the matter would be to credit the living with being no worse than the dead, so you may realise how much better

the people of the present day are than they seem ! As we are bound to live in the world, where we find ourselves without even being consulted in the matter, it is as well to make the best of it, and of the age in which we chance to appear on the scene ; we might have been born earlier and have been no happier !

Though we searched diligently amongst many a weather-stained, time-worn, and moss-encrusted tombstone, amongst others battered and broken, and some sinking slowly into the ground, with the lank grasses and nettles aiding their oblivion, we discovered no epitaph as quaint or as cleverly worded as those already mentioned ; though some caused a smile for their very imbecility and would-be wittiness, others gave food for thought, whilst a few were genuinely pathetic. Amongst the last, one to an infant “Aged three weeks,” was touching in its simplicity, and thus it ran :—

She took the cup of life to sip,
Too bitter 'twas to drain ;
She merely put it from her lip,
And went to sleep again.

This reminds me of a somewhat similar one, in that it makes the best of a brief existence, that is (or was) to be found at Walcott, in Norfolk, which I think merits quotation here :—

When the Archangel's trump shall blow,
And souls to bodies join,
Many will wish their lives below
Had been as short as mine.

On one large flat tombstone we read the name,

finely and clearly cut, of "Willm Lawrence," just that and nothing else. But why this strange reticence? Another tombstone had merely a succession of initials with simply dates below, the first date being 1834, and the last being 1869. The record of the dead could hardly be briefer. An initial in place of a name and a date below! Still another stone simply bore the words "For love is stronger than death." But though love be stronger than death, it has not the power to prevent its records cut in stone from wasting away, or the tombs themselves going to inevitable decay.

As we were about to leave the sad colony of graves for more cheerful wanderings amongst the glad green fields beyond the castle walls, we met a grey-haired old man, who greeted us with a pleasant "Good evening." We duly acknowledged his greeting, and would have passed along, but manifestly he was inclined to gossip, and gossip he would. Country folks lead dull, uneventful lives, and when they get the ear of a willing listener they do not readily let it go; even such a minor incident as a few words with a stranger helps to break the monotony of their existence. Then he remarked, presumably with a view of saying something further, "You be a stranger in these parts, I expects; least-ways, I don't remember having seen your face before." After indulging in certain long and uninteresting details of his life, from early boyhood until that very hour, to all of which we had perforce to listen, he went on without a pause: "I be an old man now, though I'm not rusting away. I do a

turn of work still. I don't mind work so long as it be not too hard. Some day, I suppose, they will bury me here, and that will be an end of me, unless I become an angel." I know not why, but it seemed to us a strangely incongruous thing to imagine that wizened old man becoming an angel! We could not repress a smile; in thought we had taken a sudden leap from the pathetic to the ludicrous! However, we remarked that he looked well and hearty still, and good for some years yet. He shook his head doubtfully. "Well, I don't know so much about that. I begin to feel my age. Now, what I want to know is, where be I a-going when I die? It may be a bit wicked like, but I don't fancy doing nothing but singing hymns for ever, as the parson preaches. I know the worst of this life, and I want to know the worst of the other." Even the simple countryman, whose forefathers were satisfied to live and to die without questioning, is beginning to think over the problem of the future for himself, and is not afraid to speak his thoughts freely and plainly to an utter stranger. From the mediæval days to these how great is the gap! Then Russell Lowell's lines anent the "good old times" came to mind:—

Oh days endeared to every muse,
When nobody had any views.

Oh happy days, when men received
From sire to son what all believed;
And left the other world in bliss,
Too busy with be-devilling this!

Whence? Whither? Wherefore? How? Which? Why?
All ask at once, all wait reply.

Men feel old systems cracking under 'em;
Life saddens to a mere conundrum,
Which once Religion solved, but she
Has lost—has Science found?—the key.

I wonder who but Lowell could have found a rhyme
to conundrum?

The next morning, having readily obtained permission, we set forth to see the ancient and historic castle of Berkeley. I doubt if the majority of people appreciate and prize as they should the consideration and kindness so generally shown by the owners of places of historic and other interest in allowing them to be invaded by sight-seers. "An Englishman's house is his castle," but if a place with a story or any tradition attached to it, many tourists, and the average tripper, appear to consider otherwise. I once heard of a gentleman who purchased an ancient country mansion, in which—according to local, and most improbable, tradition—Queen Elizabeth once slept a night; and he was so annoyed by the constant coming of utter strangers, who drove over from a neighbouring town and requested to view the chamber in question, and the resentment some of them pointedly showed when the request was refused, that at last, being a man of retiring disposition, he was actually driven to sell the property. Carlyle, it may be remembered, when living at Craigenputtock, suffered a good deal from the enterprising tourist, who frequently found his way there with the view of seeing the house in which

the genial author of *Sartor Resartus* lived. However, being a man of genius, Carlyle hit upon the expedient of paying a neighbouring farmer so much a year to act as guide, and to show visitors his farm-house and pretend it was Craigenputtock! By the way, what a number of old houses there are scattered over the country in which, according to tradition, "Good Queen Bess" has stopped, or feasted, or slept. I do not think I have ever made a lengthened tour without coming upon at least one or two. A few years ago an Essex parson took me over a decayed and ancient mansion in his parish, and he pointed out a bedchamber therein said to have been occupied by that famous sovereign during one of her numerous progresses. He then called my attention to a small square of genuine old stained glass let into the leaded panes of the window. In the centre of this was the representation of a Tudor rose surmounted by a crown, and the capital letters E and R (possibly intended for *Elizabeth Regina*) were placed one on either side of the rose in order given. I have been told, said the parson, by an antiquarian friend, that it was a matter of etiquette with Elizabeth to present to the owner of any house in which she stayed one of these devices, to be placed in the window of the room wherein she slept, as a memento of her visit. Whether there is any truth in the story I cannot say; I merely repeat what was told to me. One travels and picks up odd bits of information, which the wise traveller neither accepts nor rejects at the time, but retains in his memory for future reference.

We entered Berkeley Castle by an arched gateway, reached after crossing the moat, now drained and dry, by a stone bridge that has taken the place of the ancient draw-up one of timber. Within the doorway the worn grooves for the portcullis may still be seen, a graphic reminder of the brave days gone by and of warriors bold—

The good old rule
Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can.

A simple creed that was acted upon, and is not even yet outworn, only to-day we take and keep by cunning, not by open combat; we are less crude than of old, more refined and civilised! "There goes feudalism," exclaimed the then headmaster of Rugby, as he saw one of the early trains of the London and Birmingham Railway go by. I had no idea that feudalism had lasted so long! "The Iron-Way" I note it is called on a map of that day in my possession.

Beyond the gateway we found ourselves in the great courtyard, surrounded by embattled walls, grey and grim—a veritable atmosphere of the past seemed to be enclosed by them. In a few yards we had stepped back as many centuries! We stood upon historic ground.

Castles we love as stages where great plays
By famous men were acted in old days.

To the left of us rose the massive keep, sombre and stern; even the bright morning sunshine failed to

lighten up its century-gathered gloom. The taint of a terrible crime committed there long years ago seemed still to brood over it, as though the dark deed done within could never be shaken off. So much for sentiment and the impression that a scene may produce upon the receptive mind. Had the frowning keep no gruesome history, its walls would have appeared as dark and gloomy ; but the knowledge of past happenings impressed our imaginations, and gave their gloom a pregnant meaning. What the eye sees the mind translates according to the temperament of the man ; it is the mind that does the romancing. To Peter Bell—

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more ;

and to the matter-of-fact traveller an ancient castle is an ancient castle, and it is nothing more. Like the kingdom of heaven, the subtle charm of a place or a scene lies within one. So two artists never paint the same landscape alike, for they paint what they feel as well as what they see. To many also the great pleasure in reading accounts of places that they know is to learn how they appear to others. Before me now, as I am writing this, hang two pictures on my study walls, done by two artist friends of mine, and artists of repute. I saw both these pictures painted, and they both represent the same scene (Snowdon, with Pont-y-Garth in the foreground, and the mountain river Llugwy fretting and foaming along its boulder-strewn bed), and they

are both painted from almost the same spot, yet each artist has interpreted the spirit of the scene differently. They have put their own personality into their works, so that I see the scene through other eyes.

Crossing the courtyard of the castle, we were escorted to a large stone doorway at the foot of the walls opposite to the keep. We were told to ring the bell there, and that some one would come and show us over the building. The jawbones of a gigantic whale were displayed, in the form of a Gothic arch, over this doorway, and we learnt that these came from a huge whale captured in 1620 in the estuary of the Severn below the castle, though what a whale was doing there in semi-salt water, far from his proper home in the open sea, is a mystery; possibly he was old and ill and had lost his bearings. A woman answered our ring and took charge of us, and would that all guides were as well informed, as obliging, and as civil as she. Oftentimes the average guide is a mendacious creature, romancing beyond bounds with the view of impressing you, of increasing your interest in the place he is showing, and specially in himself, so that his tip may be the larger. "You see, sir," explained one of these unreliable guides to me one day when in a confidential mood, after I had mildly expostulated with him as to the utter improbability of some of the tales he had been relating—"you see, sir, as how I gets a lot of Americans over this place, and they tips me according to what I tells 'em, so I'm obliged to put a bit of extry history in here and

there, or they would never be satisfied. It's quite harmless, it delights 'em, and don't hurt nobody. They want a bit of history with every room, and I oblige 'em to the best of my ability. I used to get out of my depth sometimes though at first. I got muddled with dates and people, not being so learned then as I be now. The worst mistake as ever I made was when I got Oliver Cromwell a-hunting after Queen Mary. It's quite an art, I assure you, to be a guide and make no mistakes. A bit of extry history does so add to the interest of a place, and I seldom has complaints. Yours is the first I've had for a year or more now. You see, I've my living to get, and a family to keep; and all the people I tell about be dead and gone, so what's the harm?" Thus the demand for traditions is met by an ever ready-made supply. Then, perchance, comes along the guide-book compiler in search of information, and not over-exacting as to the authority from whence it originates; more anxious to obtain copy than to be critical, accepting what he is told for gospel, so long as it be interesting, and he falls an easy, if not a wholly innocent, prey to the showman. Oftentimes the guide-book compiler is in a hurry, and allows himself only just time to jot down the particulars given to him. During a previous journey, whilst inspecting an old historic house of exceptional interest, to which I devoted the whole of a long summer day and found it far too short, one of these compilers chanced to arrive on a bicycle, and having duly tipped the house-keeper, promptly proclaimed who he was and the

purpose of his visit ; then, pulling out his note-book, without further delay, and without more than a very hasty glance over but a portion of the place, proceeded to take down such particulars therein as she gave him, replaced the book in his pocket, remounted his bicycle, and rode away in search, I presume, of other material. I do not think that he was as much as twenty minutes all told on the spot. This is an unvarnished fact. I knew the house-keeper well, for it was not the first visit I had made to the house, and upon this occasion, half jokingly, half satirically, I remarked to her, "You've forgotten to tell the gentleman that Queen Elizabeth once spent a night here." (I have become quite enamoured with that well-worn legend, for, provided the house is sufficiently important and old enough, it always serves.) "Indeed, sir," exclaimed that honest body, "I had no idea that she ever was here." No more had I ; yet I fancy the "fact" was duly recorded in that note-book !

But I have been digressing. Placing ourselves in the hands of the guide, we were first shown the great baronial hall, said to be one of the oldest and finest in England. Certainly it makes a beautiful and effective picture with its panelled walls hung around with fine family portraits of lordly warrior and courtly lady, and dotted here and there with specimens of ancient armour ; its stained glass in the tall mullioned windows, through which the softened sunshine comes, glorified by the rich hues of its heraldries and gay emblazonings, and its original open-timbered roof, dusky with age, amongst

the rafters of which the daylight fades away in a mystery of shadows. The stained glass, we were informed, dated from as early a period as 1115, though the hall was erected in 1327, so that, I presume, some of the glass came from a former building. Nor must I forget to make mention of two tattered banners hanging there that waved in Flodden Field and Culloden, borne by the lords of Berkeley's regiments in those fierce struggles.

Besides the portraits in the hall there were others in the ample passages, done by such masters of their art as Vandyke, Lely, Reynolds, Holbein, Gainsborough, Hoppner, and other famous painters. Then we had pointed out to us many ancient relics, amongst these being a chair presented to Queen Elizabeth by Sir Francis Drake, and a thumbscrew that he had brought from Spain. Then there were some cushions finely embroidered by Catherine of Aragon, and numerous things besides. But I will refrain from enumerating these catalogue fashion. To describe them all in detail would take up more room than I can spare, and they deserve more than mere mention. In truth, interesting as they were, the old historic building interested us vastly more, for art treasures one may view in museums, but a feudal castle one must travel to see ; that cannot be transported and placed under glass !

Next we came to the chapel, of the same age as the hall, and, like that apartment, it retains its original timber roof. Possibly of more recent date is the carved oak gallery pew, having a private approach from the withdrawing-room ; this is for the use of

the family, the retainers sitting below. In the windows we noticed some charming old stained and painted glass; in one of the lower lights our guide pointed out a translucent sun-dial (a quaint device that one sometimes finds in ancient houses, so that by glancing at the window when the sun shines one may always tell the time). In this case the special point of interest lay in an unfortunate fly that was embedded in the glass of the dial. We presumed that it got there by an accident in the making, but were informed that it was placed thus purposely as a symbol that "Time flies." Truly a curious conceit, one worthy of the medieval craftsman, whose heart rejoiced to preach a moral or to tell a tale in painted glass, carved wood, or sculptured stone, or in any other way he could. Not only in the window here did the ancient craftsman indulge his fancy, for on the stone corbel supporting the roof we observed the carving of a big toad with a man's head below. We at once divined that that too had a meaning, and we divined aright. Questioning our guide concerning it, she said, "That is to preserve the memory of a monstrous toad, as big as a bushel measure, that lived in the dungeon, and used to come to the king and frighten him." As well it might! A wonderful story, in truth, of which an old writer, one Smyth, remarks: "Every man's beliefe is left to himselfe, and I know what myselfe thinketh thereof; but be it a lye or a trueth, it was generally believed." Truly an age of wonders, "when so many marvels happened, that people ceased to marvel at them."

From the chapel we were conducted to the medieval kitchen, "as old as any portion of the castle, and unaltered since it was built." It is a large, curiously shaped six-sided apartment of rough-hewn stone walls. It did not impress us greatly, for the modern cooking appliances, by their assertiveness, destroyed the harmony of its ancientness. But our guide bade us look up at the roof. "That is the original cobweb roof," said she; "you see that the beams make for a central point and are crossed like a gigantic cobweb. I believe that such a kind of roof is very rare; indeed, I am not sure if there is another of the sort in England." And looking up at the blackened rafters, we saw that they took the form she said. Whether there is any other roof of the kind existing in the country I cannot say; certainly I have not seen such a one before, though I have explored many a feudal castle and many an old-time manor-house; but one hardly looks for beauty in a kitchen, so this is a feature readily missed. Of kitchens with stone-arched vaultings I know a number.

From the kitchen we crossed the courtyard to the dungeon-chamber, beneath which is the dungeon. We did not specially desire to see the latter, but it is one of the sights of the place, and our guide appeared wishful to show it, so we let her have her way. My curiosity does not extend to dungeons. They are all much alike—dark, damp, dismal, and depressing; merely in degree do they vary, in that some are a trifle less dark, and some less damp than others; only to the seeker after horrors could any

one of them be attractive. The great dungeon of Berkeley is not lighted in any way, being merely a gigantic dry well some thirty feet deep, and perhaps a little wider across. Access to it is given by a trap-door in the floor above, and through this trap-door a lighted candle was lowered for our benefit, but it only served to make the darkness below appear the more profound. There was no sentimental feeling about captives in the medieval days. What would those fierce old barons think of our modern model prisons, could they return to life and see them, I wonder?

Next we were taken up a stone stairway by the side of the keep. At the top of this we came to a paved landing open to the weather, excepting for a rough timber shelter that leads to a small chamber overlooking the courtyard—the bed-chamber occupied by the unfortunate King Edward II., and in which, we were told, he was done to death. I believe that certain antiquaries are disposed to doubt if this chamber were the scene of the murder, and incline to the view that it was more probably committed in the dungeon-chamber. But why they differ from the generally accepted, and in this instance, it seems to me, plausible tradition, I cannot say. The chamber appears well suited for such a foul purpose, being set apart from the rest of the building, and only approached by a long stairway. Horace Walpole, who visited the castle in 1774, says: "The room shown as that in which Edward II. was murdered I verily believe to be genuine. It is a dismal chamber, almost at the top of the keep,

quite detached, and to be approached only by a kind of foot-bridge, and from that descends a large flight of steps that terminate in strong gates—exactly a *corps-de-garde*.” I do not know what Walpole means by “a kind of foot-bridge,” unless, as seems probable, he mistook the timber shelter-way for one. It must have been there in his day, for it looks ages old; indeed, I should imagine that it was erected upon the king’s first imprisonment as a concession to his comfort and dignity, for I do not suppose at that time there was any serious thought of doing away with him. It may be he was placed in that secluded chamber originally for better security.

The room itself, though somewhat small and irregular in shape, has not an uncomfortable look, owing doubtless to the crimson tapestry with which the walls are hung, that gives it a warm and furnished appearance, for though the tapestry is a good deal faded it still retains something of its original rich red colouring. I had no idea that a medieval apartment could look so comfortable, and it must be remembered that it has been left for long years uninhabited; even a modern, luxuriously appointed room might not seem so very inviting after so long a lapse of years, with the colouring gone from its wall-papers and decayed hangings. The carved four-poster bedstead with its tapestries and coverings tattered and worn, in which the king slept, or probably generally tried to sleep, is still there, and alongside of it is the humble pallet-bed of his attendant.

“It was on that bed,” exclaimed our guide, pointing to the four-poster, “that the king is said to have been smothered with pillows, then to make perfectly sure that he was dead his murderers ran a red-hot rapier right through his body, it being made red-hot so as to avoid any signs of blood.” Then she held up to us an ancient and rusty rapier—“the actual weapon with which the deed was done.” But why this further needless horror? Surely the rascals could have told when their victim was no more without this gruesome act. However, such was the story of the murder given to us, according to the tradition handed down in the castle from one generation to another.

Having taken our fill of horrors we parted from our guide at the door of the fateful chamber; whereupon she suggested that we should mount to the top of the keep for the sake of the magnificent view to be had from there. Truly from the top of the flag-tower the panorama is of far extent and of great and varied beauty; to the north, half hidden in haze, we beheld a multitude of hills that rose abruptly out of the richly wooded levels where the woodlands faded into blue—a prospect vague and vast! To the west we gazed down upon, and over, the wide estuary of the silvery Severn, away to the dark woods of the Forest of Dean, and beyond these again we had a misty vision of the wild Welsh mountains—rugged and remote—on the high horizon; to the south we caught the gleam of the distant sea. So our eyes, free to rove over the wide, green, space-expressing landscape,

Traced the track
Of the sea-seeking river back,
Glistening for miles above its mouth,
Through the long valley to the south ;
And looking northward, cool to view,
Stretched the illimitable blue.

In the west,
Dim through their misty lair, looked forth
The space-dwarfed mountains to the sea,
From mystery to mystery.

Then we descended to the wall-girt stillness of the old courtyard, and wended our way back to our hotel and its comparative modernity. Berkeley Castle is a chapter of history in stone. Over its time-rent, storm-stained, and battle-broken walls an air of ancient romance lingers, though I could wish that the romance were not smirched by the memory of a hideous crime.

CHAPTER XIII

Whither?—A bit of old England—An ancient town—A lonely hostel—Traditions—A desolate stretch of country—Sleepy hollows—The silence of the uplands—The magic of sound—Memories—Wood fires—The charm of old houses—The spirit of place.

REACHING our hotel we soon had our bags and rugs packed in the car and were ready for the road again. It may seem strange, but it was only then that we realised we had no idea where we were going! We could not drive across the broad estuary of the Severn, for there was no bridge; we had come from the south, so there was only the north and the east to choose from, and after a hasty glance at our map, we chose the east as promising the pleasanter wandering. To the north there appeared to be only one main road between the hills and the river, and this was a high road, and probably a dusty one, that led to Gloucester, and to Gloucester we had often been; now to the east lay a district, not much travelled and out of the tourist beat—"because," possibly, the tourist would have exclaimed, "there is nothing to see there." In a sense the tourist would be correct, for though we found the country very charming, its charms were purely pictorial and unsensational, of the quiet,

homelike type, that would hardly appeal to the excursionist; there was nothing strange or exciting about it—it was simply beautiful. A bit of genuine old England—a land of sleepy little towns and pleasant villages, primitive and picturesque; a land wherein men dream their lives away; a land wherein men are born, are married, and die uneventfully, and leave no record of themselves behind, beyond what one may find scratched on their tombstones; still, after all, to live happily is the thing, and a quiet life has its own rewards; to some the striving after fleeting fame seems vulgar and absurd. “Ambition,” says Benjamin Franklin, “has its disappointments to sour us, but never the good fortune to satisfy us.” Ambition is the curse of the world, and the ceaseless struggle for fame or fortune has been the cause of much of the world’s growing ugliness. We exist in a perpetual rush nowadays; the old-time, simple, restful life has lost its charm, but it makes a pleasant memory! “*La rapidité*,” exclaims Theophile, “*voilà le rêve de notre siècle*.” So to come into a land like this at rest was to receive Nature’s benediction.

Upon glancing at our map we formed a hazy notion of driving to Tetbury, by way of Wickwar and Chipping Sodbury; beyond Tetbury, if perchance we reached it, our hazy programme ceased; the road to Wickwar appeared to be fairly direct, in spite of which we missed that spot, though we turned up at Chipping Sodbury in due course. Chipping Sodbury is one of those delightful, little, old-fashioned towns that charm the eye of the

artistic and cultured traveller, not on account of any beauty, but simply because they are so old-fashioned and so natural. It just escapes being quaint, and it is clean and quiet; the low-built houses that face its one wide street have a sun-faded look; I should imagine that Chipping Sodbury has suffered little change since the days of the Stuarts; in truth, had a troop of King Charles' cavaliers come gaily riding into the place there would have been little in the surroundings to show that they were an anachronism. It is a very ancient town, yet not decayed, and is hallowed by its ancientness—a townlet that sleeps in the sunshine forsaken by the traveller, and content to be forgotten. Only a few idlers, in countrified clothes, were in evidence as we slowly drove along, and they took the coming of our car quite unconcernedly, not even troubling to glance up at it, so little curious were they—like “that marvellest knight, Sir Garlon, who goeth invisible,” we might have gone by invisible, for any observable impression we made on the inhabitants! Such a conceit certainly occurred to us.

From Chipping Sodbury a drive of a mile or more brought us to Old Sodbury—a weather-beaten little village at the foot of a hill. From the name one might imagine that Old Sodbury was the more ancient place of the two, though it hardly looked the part. Our road now began to mount the hill, and we noticed let into the wall of a house, on the right-hand side of the way, a stone tablet having plainly cut thereon, “Gradient One in Eleven.” An interesting bit of information, though

of small utility to the traveller ; for, whatever the gradient, he is bound to go up it. At another spot we were further informed that we were, "Height above Sea, 300 feet." I presume that such details interest some people ; more to our fancy was a signpost we came to on a previous journey, with its solitary arm pointing up a narrow path and briefly inscribed, "To the finest view in the County."

We were greatly taken by this thoughtful consideration for the stranger, so singular as to be, in our experience, unique, and we blessed the authorities on account of their enlightenment. Having stopped the car with a view of exploring, we asked of a man standing close by if he knew how far it was to the view. "It be over a mile," replied he ; "but I don't think the view be worth the climb." "Why, how's that?" we queried ; "it says 'to the finest view of the county.' Surely it must be worth seeing?" Then came the unexpected rejoinder, "Well, I don't think it is ; there be lots of finer views. You see it's like this : the man as that notice belongs to, he keeps a refreshment room at the top, and that's how he attracts visitors there. Lots of people are induced by that sign to go up, and I expects many of them would be glad of a little refreshment when they get there." After hearing this, and upon due consideration, we did not venture on that climb, for the way was steep, the day was hot, and the man's tale was probably true ; the general contour of the country around certainly promised a view from the top of the hill, but neither one remarkable nor specially extended.

We had a stiff climb out of Old Sodbury, and when the climb was ended we found ourselves on an elevated upland over which the wind seemed glad to blow and the sun to shine. In due course we came to four cross roads, where stood a forsaken-looking little inn with all its windows and doors closed, as though for some strange cause it did not seek for custom. It was indeed a lonely spot; there was no sign or sound of life around; we felt quite sorry for the poor old inn left by the fate of circumstances stranded high and dry out of the way of modern travel.

To the mossy wayside tavern
Comes the noisy throng no more,
And the faded sign, complaining,
Swings unnoticed at the door—

the faded sign consisting of two crossed hands. I find this ancient hostel starred in my *Paterson's Roads* as a house where post-horses might be had. When we were there the four roads were deserted, and we looked in vain for the solitary, grey-cloaked horseman of romance; the scene was fitting, but we could not command the actor. Strange stories are told of this lonely inn; how, in the days departed, the landlord was in league with the "knights of the road," and for valuable information given about "likely" travellers, would share the highwayman's spoils without the graver risks attendant upon that profession. But probably these stories are pure inventions; the lonely old inn that has known better days is suggestive of bygone

romance; it calls for traditions, it looks legendary, therefore traditions have gathered round and cling to it, as naturally as ivy gathers round and clings to a ruin! Why is it, I wonder, that certain ancient buildings, however innocent they may be of any eventful doings, and though they may be plain to ugliness without, still have the power of impressing the imaginative traveller with "a sense of mystery," a feeling that, could their walls but speak, they might some unrecorded tragedy unfold?

I think that a bleak and remote position has much to do with this sentiment; in reality it is the sense of surrounding desolation that appeals to the mind more than a solitary building therein, but the building focusses the sentiment. Thus the wide and wild country around that lonely "Cross Hands" inn, with its deserted roads stretching far away into the mystery of the distant hills, brings to mind the stories of old-time travel, when the roguish landlord of the wayside tavern, where Strap and Roderick Random halted, "spoke Latin, and among the company were the Curate cheating the Exciseman at cards, the Rector about whom the Curate told unimproving tales; and the Highwayman who, though a gentleman of indifferent morals, had his ideas of honour outraged by the coachman giving information to a rival "when under articles to him!" and so one thinks to oneself, why, this desolate hostel is the very spot for such past-time incidents to have taken place. Then one's mind's eye pictures the solitary and belated traveller on horseback wending his weary way over those desolate roads to the

shelter of that lonely inn, and to the care of its possibly roguish landlord. The scene inspires the picture, and the ghostly actors give to the inn its importance.

The romance was, in part, of our own making. I wonder where would be the pleasure of travel without sentiment? Thoroughly to enjoy a tour you must indulge your inclinations—be fancy free. Possibly, in spite of all traditions, the history of that inn was quite prosaic and uneventful, its landlords being, one and all, worthy and honest men; it may never have known the presence of a “knight of the road”—and yet, for all, in a dull world one inclines to traditions; one reads good fiction for the pleasure of it, knowing it to be fiction and nothing else, but traditions appeal to me more strongly—for, just possibly, they may be true. In that possibility lies their glamour. Tradition is often founded upon fact—with some added seasoning, no doubt, and like good wine it improves with age!

Beyond the cross-roads we kept on high ground for many miles; the ancient highway stretching far away in front of us, gradually narrowing into a thread-like line that eventually lost itself in the hazy horizon, and not a soul was to be seen on it in all that lengthening distance! We were alone with earth and sky! Around and below us stretched, with many undulations, the sun-flooded earth, flushed by the sweet, wild wind coming from the west, laden with the gathered fragrance of idle growing things. How gladsome seemed that breeze with all its exultant vitality; to inhale it was like

breathing champagne! The country around us rose and fell like some mighty, billowy sea turned into good green land. And in the sheltered valleys we caught passing peeps of fertile farms and time-toned farmsteads preserved in all their ancient peacefulness by the encircling hills. To us they bore a remote and unsophisticated air; the march of progress and "the thoughts that shake mankind" leave them undisturbed. They are the "sleepy hollows" of the land where the serpent has forgotten to leave his trail!

We were high up in the world, and as we looked down upon it all its affairs seemed very trivial to us; it was not a feeling of superiority, but just a feeling of relief to escape for a while from the complexities and from the tiresome conventionalities of society, to have

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms.
Strong and content to travel the open road.

It has been left for civilised man to ask, "Is life worth living?" To us that day it was supremely worth living! Even to breathe the sweet, light, bracing air was of itself a joy, a tonic for brain and body. And how pure was the deep blue of the sky, how white the drifting clouds above. Pure air and pure colour everywhere. There is something in the vision of great spaces of land, air, and sky that is very inspiring. All fretful detail is lost in the mighty sweeps of the wide, green world below and the great dome of sky above; to see broadly is to think broadly, and to think broadly

makes for contentment. Nature was in a joyous mood that hour, and so were we—our moods were one!

The lark's on the wing,
God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world.

Over these lonely uplands broods a great silence as a rule, a silence made the more impressive by the occasional tinkling of a distant sheep-bell or the faint chime of a far-away church clock. But that day it was the hurrying wind that disturbed the usual tranquillity of the spot, for as it swept over the long grasses and the corn crops it made a musical murmuring, delightful to listen to; but also it wailed mournfully through the crevices of the rugged stone walls, and amongst the branches of the storm-bent, ragged thorns. Sounds have at times the power to conjure back memories of long-forgotten things. I wonder if there is any one who has not experienced this? You may be unable to reason how or why, but memories that have lain dormant for long years are suddenly aroused by a sound you have heard, perhaps, a thousand times before, but not till that moment had it any message to convey. Wordsworth often appeals to sound as well as to the eye to help his picture, as in the following expressive lines:—

The single sheep, and that one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall.

How the dreariness of the scene is emphasised by listening in imagination to the storm-blast sweeping through the crannies of that broken wall, a sound

that forthwith recalls memories of desolate mountain places! But the magic of sound is mostly due to certain unconscious associations with it. Some time back, when I was in a little Northamptonshire village, chatting in the church porch thereof with the clerk, a sudden storm came on, and the wind fairly howled round the ancient edifice and whispered eerily amongst the tombstones. "The wind be a-talking," exclaimed my companion, "and when the wind talks like that it bodes no good," upon which he shook his head wisely; but what hidden meaning he may have had in that saying I could not get him to explain; but the expression "the wind be a-talking" was a fresh one to me.

Our elevated stage at last came to an end, and we began to descend gradually into a country of woods, hedges, and soft airs; the landscape had assumed a gentle aspect. English scenery is never the same for long; it ever surprises the traveller by its endless variety, so it never becomes monotonous—and least of all to a traveller in the speedy motor car. That is one of the advantages of driving about England, the constant changefulness of the landscape; there is no wearisome sameness about it, unless perhaps it be in the Fen district. After the bleak loneliness of the uplands, the fertile and well-wooded lowland country had a distinctly companionable look. Some such familiar prospect must have been in Thackeray's mind when he wrote: "The charming, friendly English landscape! Is there any in the world like it? To the traveller returning home it looks so kind,—it seems to shake hands

with you as you pass through it." The first village we came to—one of ancient, time-toned, stone-built houses, that looked as though it had never known the hand of the modern builder—very charming was its aspect of restful antiquity and out-of-the-worldness; it seemed "to shake hands" with us! Stopping there to take some photographs, we asked a boy, dressed like a farmer's lad, who stood by watching our proceedings, the name of the place, and he said it was Doughton, even thoughtfully spelling the name for us of his own initiative. "It be a pretty village," he said. This remark fairly surprised us, for one hardly expects a villager, especially a farm lad, to appreciate the beautiful. Had he remarked that it was a dull place we should have taken it quite as a matter of course. Then, as we were photographing a house opposite, he remarked, "There be a much beautifuller house at the other end of the village, the one in which Mr. Dash lives." It was a novel and pleasant experience for us to find a rustic with an eye for the picturesque; moreover, the boy was right. The house he called our attention to was certainly the most picturesque of any, only, unfortunately, owing to the position of surrounding outbuildings, we could not obtain a good point of view of it in the camera. The boy interested us. We hoped to have had a long chat with him, but he said he was going to his work and must be off. It is mostly the uninteresting folk who appear to have time for gossiping! Perhaps it is because they are uninteresting that makes us feel this.

The houses of Doughton are of the simple and homelike Cotswold type, and are larger and more important than those one generally finds in villages, showing, I take it, that they were erected at a period when not only the poorer classes, but men of moderate wealth, were content and glad to live in the country ; and from the cared-for look of the Doughton homes they still appear to do so there. The Cotswold type of house appeals to me on account of its honest construction, lastingness, and simplicity. It is both built and roofed with stone ; its walls are delightfully thick, so that the interior is warm in winter and cool in summer ; its roof of thin split stones, sized down from the top to the eaves (the smallest being at the top), makes the loveliest covering possible to imagine, for these stone slates form a mosaic of many greys, ranging from cool to warm ; nor are they laid with machine-like, monotonous regularity as are the blue slates or red tiles of a modern building, and their rough surfaces encourage the growth of gold and silver lichen, further enhancing their charm. The old builders understood the importance of a roof, and they took pains to make it beautiful, and they made it high pitched, the better to throw off the rain and the snow. A roof emphasises the shelter that a home gives to a man.

An essentially English style of house wherein there is no manifest striving after the picturesque. A house symmetrical and well proportioned that pleases the eye by its look of solidarity, as though designed to withstand both time and tempest



OLD HOUSE AT DOUGHTON.

What picturesqueness it possesses comes without being sought after. Such houses are generally one room deep, so that they are long rather than wide, which allows of plenty of window light on either side, and permits them being covered by one span of roof, thus giving better weather protection, the line of roof being broken by big dormer gables. Their mullioned windows are always provided with the good old-fashioned casements, that are easily opened with one hand, and when well made, as they were, never rattle nor let in the wet. I often wonder why the casement window went out of use, for it has many advantages over the sash contrivance that has so generally taken its place, though in many recent buildings, I am glad to find, there is a reversal to the old type.

The windows are placed flush with the outer walls, leaving a deeply recessed space within that allows ample room for a cushioned seat, which arrangement gives a cosy look to a room; or it may be that, in place of a seat, there is a wide shelf for the display of flowers or bits of blue china. And what a pleasant thing a mullioned and transomed window is; it gives one the idea of enclosed space, a something quite different to the plate-glass sash window that is, after all, but a glazed hole.

Within, these old houses, judging from those that I have seen, are delightfully picturesque, though, according to modern ideas, their planning is somewhat inconvenient, for it is not an unknown thing in them to have to pass through one room to gain access to another. But perhaps the very

eccentricity of such planning adds to their charm—at least to those who are but passing guests. One thing I have always noticed about these interiors is the sense of snugness of their chambers, however large they may be. This is chiefly obtained owing to the old builder insisting on the predominance of width and depth over height. He preferred, for the same amount of enclosed area, to secure useful floor room instead of waste space above. What a charming feeling of repose there is about these ancient rooms with their ceilings, brown-beamed and low—the beams being adzed so that they have an interesting surface and reveal the human touch, not planed into a meaningless smoothness,—their cushioned window bays, their panelled walls, with the warm and furnished look these give; and surely the varied pattern of the natural oak graining is infinitely more pleasing to the eye than any printed wall-paper with its constantly repeated design? and, above all, their wide, open-hearth fireplaces with their upstanding fire-dogs and ornamented fire-backs of iron, not to forget their spacious ingle-nooks—real old-fashioned, roomy ingle-nooks wherein host and guest may sit and rest in snug contentment, not a mere fireplace recessed that the modern architect wrongly calls an ingle-nook, and thereby insults that term.

Of course, these ancient hearth fireplaces were intended to burn wood, and what can be more delightful or more picturesque than a wood fire properly and lovingly tended; truly it gives forth a less fierce heat than one of coal, but its warmth is

more generally diffused ; it does not bake you in front to make you feel the chill the more behind, for the wide open hearth radiates the heat more evenly than an iron grate. There is a glamour and a sense of mystery about a wood fire : it is full of pictures ; it is cheerful, clean, and sweet ; it crackles companionably ; there is something always happening with it ; its flickering flames are many coloured and fine of form, even the thin film of its pale blue smoke is poetic—for smoke can, under certain conditions, be beautiful. Moreover, a wood log is clean and pleasant to deal with, no scoop is required, only the hand ; coals are dirty, and noisy in the replenishing. And a wood fire appeals to the imagination ; you may just have fed it with a log of oak, old and gnarled, still covered with golden lichen and savouring of the forest whence it came, or it may be with a salt-seasoned block, from an old ship recently broken up, which brings with it a sentiment and a scent of the sea ; there is food for romancing and for thought in an old ship's timber log—there is even pathos in it ! Then the faint fragrance of burning wood, how redolent of the forest it is, of the country-side, or of the stormy ocean ! A wood fire takes one in imagination into the open country, or sets one's fancy a-wandering over seas ; there is an out-of-door freshness about it ; a fire of black coals leads one's thoughts underground into the darksome mine. Logs are pleasant to the eye ; coal is dusky, often dusty, and unbeautiful, more suitable for commerce, or to drive a steam engine, than for an Englishman's home.

There is a subtle charm about these old Cotswold houses quite incommunicable in words. Doughton is a village of homes, a something apart from a village of houses. The modern "desirable" villa, or mansion, never gives me this pleasing sentiment of home: it too often seeks to be picturesque by studied quaintness that betrays its aim and so defeats its object, and by stuck-on ornaments that fail to adorn, it lacks the repose that comes of simpleness; it looks as though it were built to attract the eye; the Doughton houses look as though they were built to be lived in and enjoyed. Alas! we seem to have lost the art of building simply and beautifully, and when money is no object we load our houses with disturbing details that profit nothing save the contractor's pocket; we cannot even see the charm of a bit of plain wall well laid whereon the eye may rest. The old-time builder was generally content to let his exterior be the outward expression of interior requirements, and trusted to honesty of purpose for his architectural effect. Writing of one of these old houses that he so dearly loved, William Morris says, "Though my words may give you no idea of any special charm about it, yet I assure you that the charm is there; the old house has grown up out of the soil and the lives of those who have lived on it; needing no grand office-architect, with no greater longing for anything else than correctness . . . a certain amount (not too much, let us hope) of common sense, a liking for making materials serve one's turn, and, perhaps, at the bottom a little grain

of sentiment." The impression a place produces is one of feeling, and defies mere word definition. Of course it may be said that much of the charm of an old building comes of age, for truly beyond the mellowing influences and tints of time there is an intangible presence that dwells in ancient homes, the spirit of place that appeals to many minds; one cannot create history nor purchase it, even the wealth of a millionaire cannot conjure this; it takes years in the making, but though age may give an added charm to that which once was beautiful, it can never cause the commonplace to be other than commonplace, or grace the ugly with beauty: at the best it can but soften their harsher features down—something to accomplish, but still not much. I am no worshipper of a thing just because it is old; otherwise a flint, which is most ancient, might appeal to me, and this it does not; but I find old things are mostly beautiful, therefore I prize them.

CHAPTER XIV

Tetbury—A quaint market-hall—"The way of the wind"—Roofs—The romance of the car—Pleasant experiences—The courtesy of country folk—Undiscovered England!—Beverstone Castle and its story—A legended Elizabethan home—A ghostly conveyance and driver—A pilgrims' barn—Medieval miracles—The pre-Reformation priest—The real John Bull—Travellers learn strange facts.

A SHORT run of two or three miles brought us to Tetbury, a quiet and ancient town that pleased us much because of those qualities; in these days of rush and bustle it is very soothing to come to a place where men lead, or appear to lead, a lazy existence. A leisured life has its charms as well as a strenuous one; the hush and tranquillity of these remote little towns is the very poetry of civilisation,—homeliness is their keynote, and peacefulness their birthright. Tetbury, like Chipping Sodbury, is another of the tiny, countrified towns over which the centuries pass uneventfully. Could an inhabitant thereof, of the Jacobean era, come back to life, he would hardly realise by aught he might see how long he had passed away—he might have been dead but yesterday. It needed but an old stage-coach, or a postchaise, to be standing in its traffic-

less high street to complete, for us, the illusion of being travellers arriving there a hundred years, or more, ago! We were in a spot where the hands of time seem to have stood still, that is, if one did not look too closely for the evidence of the present, as the contents of the shop windows and the dress of the people told inevitably of to-day, but these are details that do not intrude themselves upon the casual eye. There is an art in seeing only what one wishes to see. The four ancient streets of Tetbury centre upon a wide and sunny market-place, where stands the old-time market-hall, a pleasingly picturesque structure, built by men who possibly did not know how picturesquely they built; men before their day did not build better, and men since then have not built as well. It is a long, low edifice, unambitious yet dignified, upheld by a series of deep stone arches darkly shadowed in their recesses, comely in shape and strong; the line of the roof above is broken and adorned by a big turret surmounted by a bold, gilt, and restless weather-vane. A building that satisfies the eye by the grace of its proportions, only in the turret and the brazen weather-vane is there any suggestion of ornament, and these suffice. The ancient craftsman sought beauty in form and in outline, relying much on the pleasing and ever-changing effects of light and shade for his architectural results; he knew the value of restraint, the importance of breadth; having secured these, if means allowed, he rejoiced in ornamenting honest construction, but never would he sacrifice construction to ornament. Even

in a ceiling he insisted on showing the timber-work ; he never attempted to hide this with a meaningless void of plaster and whitewash ; for him, indeed, the shapely beams were themselves a decoration : he gloried in revealing construction, and never attempted to disguise it. In the case of the market-hall at Tetbury no doubt the ancient builder felt that the unavoidable long straight line of the roof needed relief, therefore he set upon it a bold turret "weathercock'd" ; so far only he indulged in added ornament, which the more adorns because it is the central feature of the building, and crowns the work whilst gathering the interest to one point. Nor is it wholly a useless ornament, for the "vane blown with all the winds" shows from whence they come, and for some reason or another it may be the weather ; "the way of the wind" is a frequent topic of conversation with the country folk. Indeed, more than once has the observation been made to me by a native, "Tell me which way the wind blows and I'll tell ye what the weather is going to be for the next four and-twenty hours," and seldom have I found the native at fault. And travelling by road, when the weather is a thing that nearly concerns one, I have frequently found the local prophets more to be relied upon than the "Forecasts" in the papers. From my experience I am inclined to think that the old-fashioned farmer could give points to the meteorological authorities in the matter of forecasting the weather. At any rate he gives you a decided and, moreover, a generally correct opinion ; he does not shelter himself with

such ambiguous phrases as "Fine in places," "Possibly rain with sunny intervals," or "Fine in the early part of the day, uncertain afterwards," which always leaves me much in doubt.

Wandering round the market-place we noticed that every building we could see still preserved its ancient grey stone roof, and this proved the age of the houses and how enduring a good roof can be, besides being beautiful. We even found ourselves gazing at the roofs simply because of the loveliness of their colourings. A century or less ago, before the ease of railway transport, no English builder dreamt of using anything for his roofs but stone "slats," or pleasing tiles, or homely thatch; now the hideously hued Welsh slate is almost universally employed to the wholesale disfigurement of the landscape; you cannot get away from it, and because of it the aspect of the country-side has actually everywhere become changed — nothing could be cheaper, nothing could be uglier, nothing could be more out of harmony with the mellow look of the fair English landscape than the chilly blue of Welsh slate, unless it be that abomination of unsightliness—corrugated iron. Few people seem to be aware how much the charm of a country depends upon the roofing of its buildings: the revenge that Wales has taken upon her English conquerors is complete!

My copy of *Paterson's Roads*, the last edition of 1829, thus describes Tetbury, and I take the liberty of giving this extract from the *Bradshaw* of the coaching age, as showing the terse account of

places that sufficed our road-faring forefathers. There is no excess of description in it, no sentiment, and I think wisely so, for sentiment is a thing that all travellers should furnish for themselves and not take at second-hand, though the modern guide-book compiler will not have it thus. "Tetbury is a respectable town" — the term "respectable" is quite delightful!—"situated on a pleasant and commanding eminence, and consisting principally of four streets, meeting in the centre, where stands a large market-house, at which great quantities of yarn are sold. On the south side of the town were the traces of a strong camp, now completely destroyed, and here was also a castle, traditionally said to have been built in the British times. The church is a handsome fabric, consisting of an ancient tower and a modern body; the former is terminated by a spire of good proportions; the latter is a successful imitation of the Pointed style, appearing externally as a single nave, with cloisters, but within-side divided into aisles by a very light arcade and clustered columns."

This past-time description of town and church will serve for to-day, and in a place so little given to change will probably serve for many long years yet to come. I even find that, with few exceptions, the old coaching and posting inns mentioned by Paterson bear to-day the same titles as given in his book, and their traditions still survive; though we may not realise the fact, these very inns are establishing new traditions to be handed down to coming generations, for motor-car

travelling has its romance, but it is a thing too new and too near for the poetry of it to be understood or appreciated; it needs the glamour of age; we talk and write lovingly about the "good old coaching days," but when it first appeared on the road the stagecoach was loudly abused as an ugly innovation, that with its rattling and horn-blowing destroyed the peace of the country-side—so history repeats itself. In another century our descendants may be talking about the "good old motoring days." Who knows? I have stood by the side of the door of a wayside inn and watched the arrival of dust-stained and tired motor travellers, who had traversed many miles of country from early morning to dusk of evening, oftentimes making far longer journeys in the day than our ancestors ever dreamed of doing, or could have done; sometimes they have had adventures on the road, some have broken down on lonely moorlands, some have lent a helping hand to others broken down, and I have fancied that there was an element of romance in the much-abused motor car. Of a truth, in all form of road travel there is a certain touch of romance—you cannot get away from it; it lingers with the road, and the wanderer thereon must needs have part in it.

As we strolled about the town we came upon a little shop with some photographs of local places exhibited in the window. I have already remarked that if there be anything of interest in the neighbourhood of a town, you are nearly sure of finding a photograph of it for sale there, and thus it chanced

that we noticed, and purchased, a photograph of the picturesque and rambling ruins of Beverstone Castle, which, we learnt from the shopkeeper, were only two miles away. Having secured an excellent little picture and much information about the ruins for the total expenditure of twopence (no charge being made for the information, so it was not an extravagant investment), we determined to start forth in search of the castle. Thus we made unexpected discoveries on the way, for, to be frank, till then we had not so much as heard of Beverstone Castle, and therefore, naturally, of its history we knew nothing, so ignorant were we about one of the most picturesque ruins of our own country! England, as Hawthorne says, "is one vast museum," and who could reasonably be expected to know all the contents of a museum so vast? I do not believe that there lives a man who could exhaust it in a lifetime. Ignorant of the old castle's past, we hazarded a guess that at one period it was held for Charles I., and was captured by the Parliamentarians, and we divined aright! Indeed, that seems to be the guide-book compiler's stock history of almost every English castle, and the number of ancient churches that, according to their clerks, were despoiled by Cromwell has long ago gone beyond my count. But it has to be remembered that there was another Cromwell in the time of Henry VIII., one Thomas, "who served his king better than his God," and "ruin for ruin," that wrought by him was of twice the quantity and quality of that wrought by the zealots of the Commonwealth. But "Oliver"

gets all the credit for the greater misdoings of his namesake.

The church of Tetbury deserves a passing glance on account of its ancient monuments, amongst which are two stone effigies of Crusaders that take the memory back to far-distant days. A curious inscription in the west aisle is also worthy of note, and thus it runs, "In a vault underneath are several of the Saunders family, late of this parish. Particulars the last day will disclose. Amen." This is truly a strange departure from the usual run of tombstone epitaphs with their vain-glorious panegyrics of the underlying dead; there is certainly an unusual modesty and subtlety shown in leaving the virtues and failings of the departed for the last day to disclose! Besides, it excites the imagination, as does that of an epitaph to a wife which I have come upon, with slight variations, in more than one churchyard, which proves its popularity, if not its originality. The most favoured version of this is as follows:—

She was—

But words are wanting to say what;

Think of all a wife should be,

And she was that.

What paragons of perfection are to be found—in the dead!

Whilst we were asking our way to Beverstone of the ostler at the inn, and if he knew whether we would be able to see over the castle, a lady drove up in a smart governess car, and, overhearing our

last query, exclaimed, "I don't think you will have any trouble in doing so; I know the tenant of the place well, he is a most obliging man; at any rate if you will mention my name to him (whereupon she most kindly gave this to us, perfect strangers though we were), I'm sure he will allow you over it with pleasure; it is very interesting and well worth seeing." So the best of good fortune followed us the whole journey through, every one we met appeared anxious to assist us; if a traveller will only make himself agreeable, as an almost universal rule, he will find the world agreeable too. Truly, we travelled mostly out of the tourist-beaten track, and this fact may, in some measure, account for our pleasant experiences. However that may be, we never once missed seeing a place we desired to see, without trouble or rebuff, and often were personally conducted over such by the owner or tenant; now, considering that we travelled far and explored quite a number of old houses, in no way regulation show places, though of considerable interest, I think the fact says much for the kindly courtesy of the English people. Only in books do I find them discourteous; perhaps the writers of these expect too much, or perhaps the fault is not wholly on one side!

We soon reached the secluded hamlet of Beverstone, that had a wan, worn look as though it were weary of being so old! A little removed from the road, peeping above some surrounding trees, we espied the grey, square keep of the castle, "all tenantless, save to the crannyng wind," and its

broken towers and ivied walls bearing the "grief-worn aspect of old days." Truly the ruined castle, with its scarred and scattered walls, its storm-rent battlements, freshly green at the top with self-sown grasses and weeds, backed by the fair green country around, made a very beautiful picture; the erst stern stronghold looked quite pathetic in its peaceful decay, crumbling slowly away, no longer of any importance and almost forgotten. At least it has been saved from the last indignity that has come to many another castle, of being converted into a sort of peep-show, with admission charged at so much a head. Better to go to quiet and picturesque ruin thus than to be so dishonoured. I do not think that I ever have come to an ancient castle that has pleased my eye more to look upon. No one part of it is specially noteworthy, but it is the happy grouping of the whole that makes the picture. To my mind, only Stokesay Castle, in Shropshire, shows as well from every point of view. Possibly some of the charm of Beverstone Castle was due to the fact that it was fresh to us; until that day we had not seen even a photograph of it, it had all the fascination of the unknown; moreover, the first sight of a place is often the most impressive. England is not half-discovered yet; there are plenty of nooks and corners in it that well repay searching for; and to drive across country without any definite plan, but to take by chance any road that promises pleasant wanderings, is perhaps as good a way as any to discover these, if not the best.

In the quiet village street we noticed the parson

walking leisurely along, when the happy idea struck us to ask him about obtaining permission to view the castle, as naturally he would know the tenant well, and might even, as the distance was short, offer to accompany us to the farm-house, where the farmer dwelt within the ancient courtyard. We were emboldened to do this, having always found country parsons most kind. Possibly to some, anchored away in somnolent rural villages, with a squire mostly absent or non-existent, and only the farmers and cottagers to talk with, the sight of a stranger may be a relief from the dull monotony of an uneventful life. I rather fancy that more than one country parson we have come upon when touring has rejoiced in the opportunity of having a chat with a stranger. In this case what we hoped for happened, though we hardly expected this further bit of good fortune; for after a short conversation the parson exclaimed, "If you don't mind waiting a few minutes whilst I make a short call, I'll go with you and show you over the castle. I know the history of it, and could explain many features of the building that you might otherwise be puzzled about or miss altogether. If you don't mind driving up to the gateway I'll meet you there, and we can explore the place together. I've nothing to do this afternoon, and shall be delighted to act as a guide." Having duly expressed our thanks, we proceeded to the gateway, where we profitably employed our spare time in taking a photograph of the castle.

The ancient gateway, with the odds and ends of farm buildings incorporated with it, buildings that



BEVERSTONE CASTLE

looked almost as old and grey as the castle itself, made a delightful picture. Unfortunately my photograph, reproduced here, gives but a poor idea of the extent of the castle or of its rambling picturesqueness. The top of the fine keep with its flagstaff may be glimpsed to the left; the main portions of the ancient stronghold are, however, hidden away in the background. The other photographs I took, showing the keep rising stately from the moat, with the rugged flanking walls and crumbling towers alongside, were more impressive, but, alas, proved failures—the only failures out of many dozen films exposed on the journey. The consolation I have, it was not my fault; the sun shone in my lens and fogged the films. I could not move the sun aside! But travellers have to put up with the conditions of light of the moment. I had even to take one building in the rain, though the result was unexpectedly good.

We had hardly packed the camera up when the parson appeared, and conducted us first through the courtyard to the keep, that being the most interesting and most perfect part of the castle. The ground floor of this is stone vaulted and dark, but in a feudal fortress light had to be sacrificed to strength. Narrow arrow slits set deep in massive walls are poor substitutes for windows; they simply serve to modify the gloom within. I am glad that I did not live in the medieval days, and especially in a medieval castle! From the ground floor, that formed the guard chamber, access is gained to the upper stories by a staircase set in a turret that projects

beyond the square of the keep. The first story contains a gallery, leading, or rather that led, to the chambers within the curtain walls, but the larger portion of the space is taken up by the garrison chapel, a fine apartment with a beautiful groined ceiling ornamented by elaborately carved bosses. Here we had pointed out to us the nearly perfect double sedilia and piscina, richly decorated, the carving thereon being almost as sharp as when first done. "The piscina, you will observe," remarked our clerical guide, "is placed right away in the corner, a most unusual position." I endeavoured to look properly surprised at this uncommon circumstance, notwithstanding that my specific knowledge on the point is an absolute blank. At the side of the narrow lancet window our attention was called to a curious recess cut out of the wall. The purpose of this is not very clear, but our guide considered it was possibly intended to provide a seat for the commander, from which, whilst attending the service, he could observe that all was well without. I have, however, my doubts as to this, for the range of vision is limited; and, moreover, I should imagine that a proper watch would be kept by duly appointed sentinels, placed at suitable points around the castle, during the time that the rest of the garrison were away at worship.

In the story above the garrison chapel we were shown the private oratory set apart for the lord of the castle and his family. This is lighted by a curious round window. The oratory is very small, and could perhaps contain comfortably a dozen

people besides the officiating priest, but there are two large squints in the partition walls on either side, so that the service could be heard and partially seen from the passages without. It appeared to me as strange that two stories of the keep, presumed to be the strongest part of a castle, should be devoted thus to chapels instead of to purely defensive purposes.

We next mounted by a steep stairway to the top of the keep for the sake of the fine view thence over the surrounding country. There was nothing specially striking in the prospect, but it was a wide and pleasant one, composed chiefly of green meadows backed by waving woods, with a vague blue outline of undulating hills beyond—a view well worth seeing, though possessing no uncommon feature, for it is one of a kind to be had from almost any moderate elevation in England, yet none the less beautiful because so abounding.

The rector pointed out to us amidst the trees the grey gables of a stately Elizabethan home peeping picturesquely forth. This, he told us, was Chavenage, a house with a history. The interior, we learnt, contains several fine old panelled rooms, some curious stained glass of early date in its mullioned windows, and much interesting furniture; some of the bed-chambers, too, are hung with quaint and ancient tapestry. We felt from the description how much we should like to see over this home of the olden time, but though we mildly hinted this desire to our companion he was not responsive, and went on to relate some of the history and the

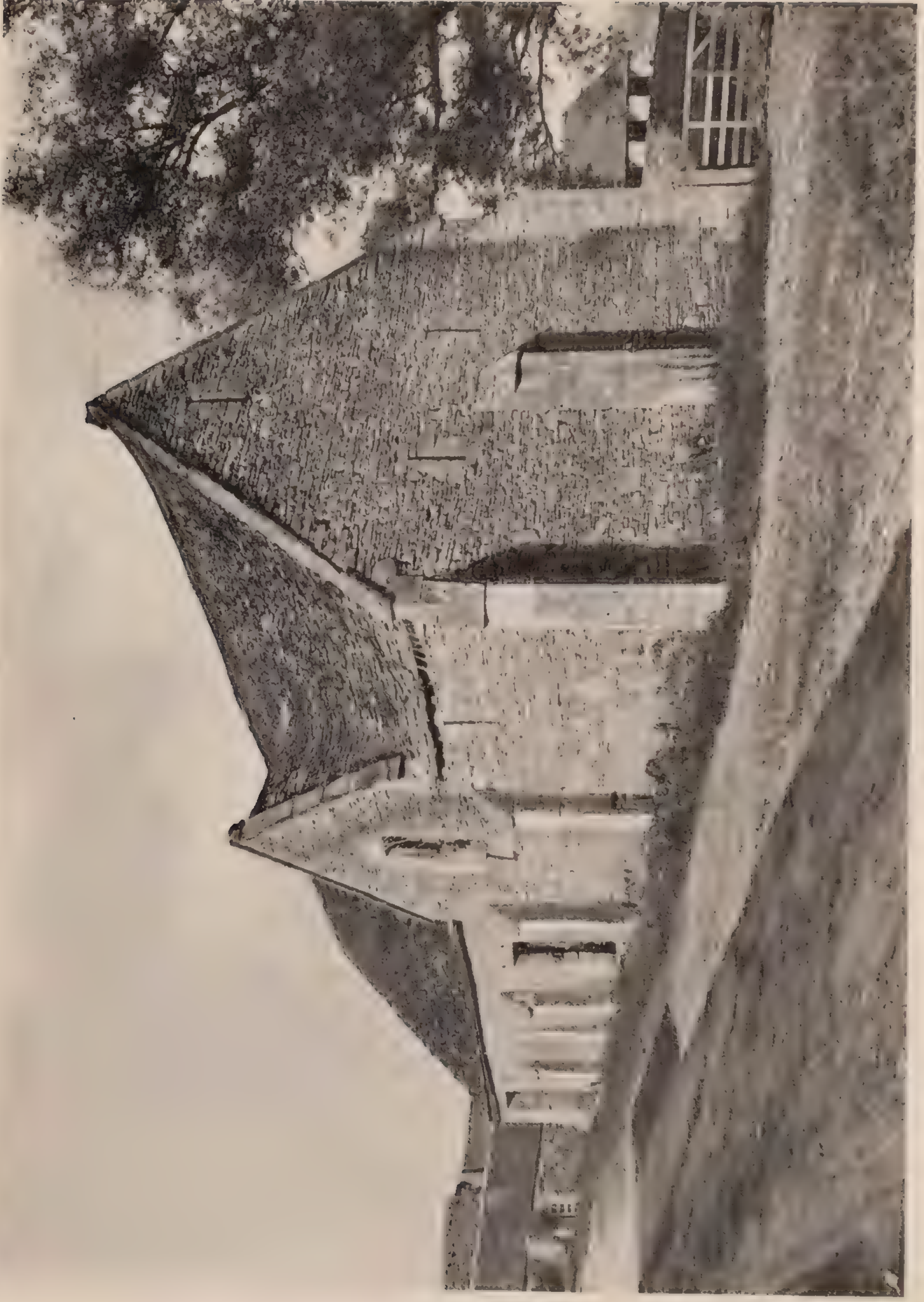
ghostly legend of the place. Both Cromwell and his son-in-law, General Ireton, it appears, were frequent visitors at one time there, its then owner, Nathaniel Stephens, being related in marriage to them. Now, though Stephens both sided with and fought for the Parliamentarians, when the struggle was over he was adverse to the execution of the King; however, Ireton overcame his scruples, and he consented to it. The very night, after giving his reluctant consent, tradition asserts that Stephens was awakened from his sleep by the spirit of his father, who appeared to him and declared with pointed brevity, "For your share in this murder you and the family are evermore accursed!" Whereupon, of course, Nathaniel Stephens promptly sickened and died. I seem to have heard the story before, but of some one else. Then a weird thing happened, according to local testimony (and local testimony is a stubborn thing to deal with), for at the moment of his death a ghostly conveyance appeared before the door of Chavenage, driven by a headless figure clad in regal robes, and took away the wailing spirit of Nathaniel; and ever afterwards, till the family became extinct, at the death of a male member thereof the same conveyance, driven by the same ghostly driver without a head, and clad in the same regal robes, drove silently up to the door, and as silently drove away again. This legend bears a resemblance to that of the Turbeville phantom coach-and-four that has been "frequently seen" to drive from the door of Wool Manor House in Dorset and along the lanes in the vicinity. Wool

Manor House, it is almost needless to remark, is the Wellbridge Manor House in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

According to the account given to us by the rector, both the siege and the defence of the castle during the Civil wars were carried on in a somewhat casual—almost, indeed, in a Gilbertian—fashion. Colonel Massey, it would appear, marched ostentatiously from Gloucester, with a force three hundred strong, to besiege it. Arriving on the spot, he bombarded the entrance gateway for a whole busy day, with little damage to it or to any one. Having failed to make any impression on the building, he summoned the garrison to surrender before he did more hurt; but the garrison boldly declined, the governor even declaring that he would eat his boots first before pulling down the flag. Then Massey began an easy-going investment of the place; whilst to pass the time away the gallant governor used to sally forth nightly from the castle in order to make love to a fair maiden who lived near by, leaving the defence of the fortress to a young lieutenant, trusting to the Parliamentarians “to play the game,” and to do nothing disturbing after nightfall. This peaceful state of affairs continued for some time, when, by mere accident, the governor was captured whilst away on one of his love-making expeditions and sent as a prisoner to Gloucester. Thereupon Massey informed the lieutenant of the fact, suggesting that, to save further trouble and possible bloodshed, he should surrender the castle, offering that he and his soldiers should go thence unmolested.

Massey, having obtained from his prisoner particulars of the weak point of the castle, and how best it could be attacked, promptly communicated this detail to the lieutenant, also hinting that if he were compelled to proceed to storm the castle, it would go hard for the garrison, at the same time pointing out that to hold it was hopeless, and how much better it would be to make an honourable surrender. Whereupon the lieutenant meekly agreed to the terms, and with his garrison marched off unhurt to Malmesbury. A pleasantly peaceful way of carrying on a war—the besiegers leisurely picnicking in the country round about the castle, whilst its governor amused himself out of it love-making! I wonder if any other strong castle were as weakly defended or as cheaply captured! One comes upon delightfully quaint bits of history when on a road tour; and a castle without a history is as wanting as a novel without a plot.

“I will now show you the church; I think it may interest you,” said the rector. The church, we noticed, was close by; in fact, it stood in the very shadow of the castle walls, a small and unpretending building dwarfed by its massive neighbour. It was late in the afternoon, and we felt that we had done enough of indoor sight-seeing for one day—the sunlit country had an inviting look—but we could hardly decline the invitation. On our way to the church we passed by an ancient and buttressed barn that, with its stone-topped gables ending in carved finials, showed a greater refinement in the building and detail than one generally discovers in such structures.



PILGRIMS' BARN, BEVERSTONE.

It was a very simple building, yet it possessed an indefinable quality that attracted our attention. This, we were told, was known as "The Pilgrims' Barn," wherein pilgrims going from the Abbey of Malmesbury to Gloucester, or the reverse, were entitled to claim a night's food and lodging. The modern tramp was born too late, for the rôle of the medieval pilgrim would have suited him to perfection—board and lodging free, and nothing to do but to saunter at ease from one shrine to another, with a pretence of worshipping sundry relics; even possibly this detail might be omitted with safety, and above all, he could beg on the way with impunity, it not being considered, as in the present unenlightened day, a crime, but rather the proper, if not, indeed, a laudable, thing to do! I wonder if the inevitable and profuse blessing—the hall-mark of his profession—that the tramp of to-day bestows upon the foolish donor of "a trifle" is an inherited custom from the early pilgrims, who in like manner always blessed the charitable giver of alms. In the matter of uncleanliness, probably the pious pilgrim of old could hold his own with the modern tramp, for I believe it was considered a point of extra holiness for the former to go unkempt and unwashed! So in this respect the tramp would have rejoiced in "the good old days"—he would have escaped the terror of the bath!

Coming to the church, on the exterior of the tower "The figure of the Resurrection" was pointed out to us—a bit of rude, but effective, Saxon sculpture, consisting of the figure of our Lord with one hand

raised in the act of blessing, and holding in the other "the resurrection flag." Within the building, what struck us most was the architectural inconsistency of Gothic arches upon Norman pillars, doubtless pointing to a later rebuilding of the edifice that once was purely Norman. We are generous in our blame of the restorer for the innovations he too often introduces in our churches. Still it has to be remembered that the builders of old showed but scant respect for the work of their predecessors; but they innovated so artistically, whilst adding a chapter to the history of the edifices upon which they wrought, that one cannot count them as great sinners. I would that the modern restorer showed an equal genius in his work, then one might regard the result thereof more complaisantly.

The font, that once was elaborately adorned with carvings, is now perfectly plain, the carvings having been carefully all sawn off, we were told, by whom the rector did not know—probably by the Puritans; at least, when anything of this kind has happened, they invariably get the credit of the act, and in the majority of cases probably deservedly. But the interesting feature of the church, in the pre-Reformation days, was a collection of curious frescoes on the walls, representing certain medieval miracles. These were naturally plastered over by the Puritans as being "superstitious pictures." On removing the plaster some years ago, they were revealed again, though sadly faded and damaged. One of these represented the miracle of Pope Gregory the Great. It may be remembered—

personally, I may confess that I have hunted up particulars of the miracle since my return home—that that Roman Pontiff, kneeling in front of the altar before the consecrated elements, prayed for a proof of the Real Presence to set his doubts as to the truth of the doctrine of transubstantiation for ever at rest ; whereupon the body of Christ appeared on the altar in place of the Host. I can, without much difficulty, picture to myself the fine fury that the very sight of that “superstitious picture” would arouse in the self-righteous Puritans, and with what supreme satisfaction and zeal they would plaster it all over. The only wonder is they did not first scrape it from off the wall to make perfectly sure of its destruction ; but, possibly, they were over-busy demolishing idolatrous things just then, so they were not as careful as they might be.

One cannot help feeling how vastly more interesting, to antiquaries at least, many of our old country churches would be had only their medieval and monkish adornments been preserved ; but over them all, in the eyes of the Puritans, was “the sign of the Beast,” so they had to go. However, though both medieval monk and priest seemed to have an inborn love of miraculous legends, whether they believed them or not, in some minor matters they were practical men, for, in the days before the Reformation, after a priest had baptised an infant, it was the custom for him to address the parents, and to caution them that “the child should be kept till it was seven years old from fire, horse’s hoof, hound’s tooth, and from water, and that it should not be

allowed to lie with its parents," etc. ; and there is wisdom in such plain talking to country folk. Had motor cars been in those times, I feel sure that the priest would have added them after "horse's hoof," and warned parents not to allow their children to make a playground of the highway! "Drat them motors, I say," exclaimed an irate mother to me one day; "before they came we could send the children out on to the road for a romp, now 'tain't safe for them on the road, and they've nowhere else to go. You wouldn't send a child to play on the railway, would you? But them motor cars are making a railway of the roads." One may feel a little sympathy for the poor hard-worked mother, with a family of noisy little ones, living in a cramped cottage, who has been accustomed to look upon that stretch of the highway opposite her door as a safe and ready playground for them, but now no longer so. In truth, till the coming of the car, the local traffic on many a byroad was so infrequent and so slow that there was little danger or inconvenience to the public in the cottagers' children thus enjoying themselves. Still, the roads were constructed for traffic, and not for playgrounds.

On bidding good-bye to our courteous guide, he pressed us to accompany him to the rectory, and there refresh ourselves with afternoon tea; but the call of the open air and the open road was too strong just then to be resisted, so the kind invitation was, with many thanks, declined. It was one of the many pleasant minor incidents of the way that we experienced, and my excuse for mentioning

the circumstance is that it goes to prove, after all that has been said to the contrary, John Bull is not such a reserved, suspicious-of-strangers creature as he is generally imagined to be. Indeed, during the journey we were twice pressed to spend the night at the homes of strangers we met by chance at our inn. During the old coaching days it has been said that "a man travelling between Edinburgh and London might meet with adventures enough to fill a volume, and companions enough to stock a portmanteau with their portraits." Truly road travel engenders a good-natured friendliness, whilst railway travel seems to freeze the friendliness out of people. You may travel by railway all your life and not make a friend—indeed, it would be an almost unheard-of thing if you did; yet never have I taken a long road tour without making one. Whether it will last or not I cannot say, but to-day there certainly exists a pleasant spirit of comradery amongst motorists, both on the road and at the inn. The motor car promises even to change our travelling manners!

After the often entertaining and frequently unveracious guides and church clerks one comes upon, characters though they be, it was a pleasure to be personally conducted over Beverstone's ruined castle and ancient church by one who spoke with authority, and upon whose statements we could rely. Even since I began this chapter, two amusing incidents of the valuable information at times imparted by local guides have been related to me by reliable persons, though in both cases the "facts" appear to

have been imparted in simple good faith. One gentleman told me that whilst he was being shown a certain panelled room in an old historic house, the guide exclaimed, "It was in this very room, and on that very table, that Charles I. signed the Magna Charta"! To which the gentleman, in good-natured satire, remarked, "Well, I never knew that it was signed here, or by Charles I., before." But the guide innocently responded, "No more have a good number of people till I've told about it, sir. They do say as how travelling is an education of itself"! Such is a sample of the sweet humour of the would-be learned guide. The other instance was that of an enthusiastic archæologist, who, upon leaving an ancient country church he had been inspecting, remarked to the clerk, "Your church is certainly a very old and interesting one." "That it be," exclaimed the clerk, without turning a hair; "it's one of the oldest in England; it were built by Julius Cæsar"!

As we were remounting the car, the tenant of the place came out to bid us good-day and a pleasant journey—a courteous attention to strangers who had disturbed his tranquillity—and we noticed that he wore a tall white hat, and very quaint it looked in that remote country spot, especially as we beheld it in combination with a faded tweed suit, leather gaiters, and big boots! Wherein, I wonder, lies the virtue in a tall hat that it should be the favourite every-day head-gear of a cheery and prosperous Gloucestershire agriculturist? Or, possibly, could he have especially donned it in our honour?

CHAPTER XV

The glamour of an evening drive—Curious place-names—"Nowhere"—The old Thames Head—Belated—At the "Hop-Pole"—Oliver Cromwell as an hotel-keeper—A mighty tithe-barn—The art of signboard painting—Puzzling carvings—A study of ancient armour and dress—Tame sport.

LEAVING Beverstone's ruined castle, whose crumbling walls have outlived their purpose, to its present-day peacefulness, we drove on through a homelike country given over to farming and rural pleasantness—a domesticated land; mellow, lovable, and telling of long abiding. For miles we were the only travellers on the lonely road, and the rhythmic beating of our engines was the only sound we heard. The shadows were gradually lengthening, the sun was already low down in the west, and only a little above the dark blue undulating line of the distant horizon. The hush of evening, that comes to the country when the toil of the day is over, was upon us. There is an old proverb that runs, "Praise a fair day at night," and we felt then that we could safely praise that glorious day, for it had ended grandly! "How delightful it would be to drive on till midnight!" my wife exclaimed; "it's better to be out of doors in the fresh air than in a stuffy room."

Let us drive on till it is ever so late." "Agreed," said I ; "we are both of the same mind." Then we blessed the motor car because it never got tired. Just at the moment accidentally I pressed down the accelerator pedal, and, the motor responding, the car bounded forward with a sudden rush, as though it were a living thing that entered with zest into the idea, and desired to assure us that it was fresh and fit, and distance mattered not !

There is a glamour about an evening drive, when the garish sunshine has faded from earth and sky, that defies precise definition. Then the country, silvery lighted, it may be, by the moon, is beheld under its most poetic aspect, for the commonplace is blotted out, and one sees things dimly, dreamily ; the distance is mysterious and vague, and even the nearer features of the landscape lack detail and assume an uncertain form. There is a subtle fascination about the indefinite that allures the imagination, whilst never wholly satisfying it. When all is uncertain the mind is free to allow its romantic faculties full play ; the poetry of a landscape lies in what a traveller creates out of it, not in its realities. The beauty of night is its mystery, in which even the familiar becomes the unfamiliar ; and when all is strange, the mind's eye can picture what it will. The mystery of evening, more than mere "distance, lends enchantment to the view," though both rely upon indefiniteness for their charm.

A signpost informed us that we were on the way to Cirencester, otherwise we should not have known whither we were travelling ; for we had not troubled

to consult our map at Beverstone, but simply drove away from there, knowing that we should eventually reach some place. Stroud struck us as a possible place, but fate ordained Cirencester, and Cirencester would do as well. We were happy to be on the road, moving; that sufficed us. Our only desire was to avoid towns as much as possible, especially large ones. The small and purely country towns did not count, for they are wholly delightful. In a few miles we came upon a lonely little hostel, displaying the strange sign of "Trouble House Inn," but why so called we were unable to discover. The title excited our curiosity, but the only person in evidence to appeal to for information was a labourer in a field, and he knew "naught about it." Afterwards we noticed the building marked on our map, reduced from the Ordnance Survey, as "Trouble House Inn." Now, when so important a map marks so insignificant and remote a wayside house thus, one naturally concludes there must be "something in it." The title certainly set our imaginations at work. The road wanderer comes, from time to time, upon places with suggestive and quaint names, such as Starveall Farm, Heathen Burials, Steelforgeland, Drinkers' Acres, and so forth. But these fairly explain themselves; there is no mystery about them. Some old country homes, too, are curiously named. A very quaint one is that of a farm-house situated near to Wetherden, in Suffolk. This is known as simply "Nowhere," and, in spite of its title, is a pleasant, old-fashioned home. But to live at, and have letters addressed to, "No-

where," seems somewhat strange. If a motorist were stopped by the police for furious driving, and gave his address as "Nowhere, near Wetherden," I wonder what that policeman would say?

Farther on the road we noticed a large and tall engine-house, with a huge projecting pump-beam slowly rising and falling, an assertive feature in the purely agricultural country around, the more assertive because a moving thing quickly attracts the eye. This we took to be a mine, and pulling up, asked a man in a field close at hand what kind of a mine it was. "Bless you, sir, that bain't no mine; that be the pump-house, as pumps the water up from what was once the Thames Head into the canal. But it pumps all the water out of the spring, and there's none left for the river, so it bain't the Thames Head no longer, you see." Glancing at our map, we noticed this apparent spot duly marked thereon as "Thames Head"; but now that the original source of the river has been pumped dry to serve the Thames and Severn canal, the question arises, what is its actual source to-day?

Then next, without further incident, we found ourselves in the outskirts of Cirencester; though ancient and interesting, as we had thrice visited the place before, we did not drive into the town, but skirting it, quickly found ourselves amongst the fields again, and by easy gradients began to climb the ever-delightful Cotswold Hills. The sun had set and the stars were faintly showing, but the moon was lazy and had not risen; still, there lingered in the western sky a golden glow. It was the peace-

ful, poetic, drowsy hour that is neither night nor day—neither light nor dark. After a time we stopped to light our lamps, for the shadows were closing fast upon us, the landscape around looked dim and dreary, the silent hills, on either hand, stretched far away into vagueness—we were driving into mystery to the accompaniment of the night wind softly murmuring amongst the woods.

The shadow of a darksome night was thrown
Over the world in which we moved alone.

Here and there the warm window lights of some far-away farm-house or lonely cottage gleamed cheerfully and companionably through the gathering gloom, but for these, the roadway, and the bounding walls, we might have been traversing some deserted region of the globe. A road is one of the earliest signs of civilisation, and so a road robs one of the illusion of being very far away from humanity. We felt thankful that the highwayman no longer haunts the land, otherwise in that lonely and unfrequented district we should have made fair game for him, though I do not quite know how he would manage to stop a car, unless, perhaps, he scattered the ground with sharply pointed nails, and trusted to a puncture "to hold it up."

As the night grew older it grew darker, but our lamps, brilliantly burning, hurled back the blackness close at hand; so ringed with light we sped along, the measured throbbing of our pistons being echoed back to us from the near hills around; "Chic, chic, chic," rang out the engines in a triumphant treble as

the car breasted the hill, and "Chic, chic, chic," came back reply. Sounds that one hardly notices in the daytime seem strangely loud at night; possibly, for some reason, the sense of hearing then becomes the more acute. I have a theory, possibly wholly wrong, that the eyesight is not so strained at night, for then things are seen broadly, and so the attention is not absorbed in ever varying and disturbing detail; this leaves more nervous force at the disposal of the sense of hearing. At least this I know, unless I purposely listen for it in the daytime, I hardly ever notice the beating of the engines on my quiet running car, but after nightfall, when there is little else to distract my attention but to watch the road ahead, the beat of the engines becomes emphatic, a sound I cannot help but hear.

As we sped onwards, carrying light into the darkness, the road, the bounding wall, and branching trees on either hand showed weirdly white shadowed with dense black; the effect was novel, strange almost to impressiveness, for we appeared to be travelling through a world without colour! Lonely though our way was we could hardly realise its true loneliness for the companionable hum of our engines! The genius of man has created out of dead metal a thing of life!

The air was fresh and fragrant with the scent of bracken and the odour of pine, but the breath of it was bracing to chilliness. Away in front of us the road gleamed white in the lights of our lamps; whither would it lead us? For scenery we had to be content with the dark outlines of the hills against

the starlit sky, the only variety we had was a variety of outline. Then suddenly we arrived, as it were, at the end of the world, the darkness ahead became less dark, and we could dimly discern stretching away far below us a vast level plain that, had we not been inland, we might have mistaken for the sea. The bonnet of the car dipped down, the triumphant treble of the engines, as they fought the hills, ceased; we had come to a sharp descent, the throttle was promptly closed, so that instead of propelling the car along the engines were holding her back; so we glided down slowly and quietly, slowly because the gradient was severe, unknown, and had to be negotiated with care, and silently because the engines had no work to do except to hold the car back. Then we reached the level lowland, where the nip of the wind was less keen.

Suddenly the thought struck us, how warming and delightful a cup of hot tea would be; it was a happy inspiration. The car was pulled up on a grassy and sheltered corner by the wayside, the luncheon basket was unpacked, the spirit lamp lighted, the travelling kettle was quickly boiling, and, "at God's green caravanserai," tea, with biscuits, was served by the light of our lamps. Never did tea taste better! and the novelty of the proceeding added to our enjoyment of the simple *al fresco* refreshment. With the hood up and our rugs wrapped around us, sitting sheltered in the rear of the car, we were as warm and comfortable as at home. We felt like glorified gipsies, and our hood was our tent. Our nomadic instincts were

aroused ; why not carry a light tent in the car and camp out at night, thought we, and so be delightfully free of hotels ! The idea was reserved for future consideration.

Thoroughly warmed and refreshed we proceeded once more on our lonely drive and into the darkness of the hour. Even with the aid of a map it is not easy to find your way at night in a strange country unless you are continually stopping to examine the signposts, or are on a main road where the direction is unmistakable. Now, though at one time we appeared to be on a main road we somehow managed successfully to get off it, and so by "indirect and crooked ways" we motored contentedly along ; the weather was fine, we were greatly enjoying our rush through the night, why should we concern ourselves about the road ? We were bound to turn up somewhere before the dawn—and the dawn was still far off.

Eventually we merged upon a broad and level highway, and the fascination of speed took hold of us ; then we found ourselves exclaiming, after Henley, "Speed as a rapture . . . Speed and the hug of God's winds . . . Speed !" It was easy running, for the road was level and invitingly deserted. "At this pace," said I, "we are bound to arrive at some town shortly, for the highways serve the towns, and miles cannot last for ever." Hardly had I spoken than lights ahead came into sight with a glow in the sky above, and the lights proved to be those of Tewkesbury, and glad we were, in due course, to find ourselves there, for Tewkesbury is a

delightful old town that it is always a pleasure to revisit, one of our favourite ports of call when "cruising on wheels" in the pleasant West Country, and soon we were safely harboured at our inn. It is difficult to tire of Tewkesbury!

The next morning we discovered, plainly painted on the wall under the porch of our hotel, the following extract from *The Pickwick Papers*:—

At the Hop-Pole, Tewkesbury, they stopped to dine,
Upon which occasion there was more bottled ale,
With some more Madeira and some port besides,
And here the case bottle was replenished for the fourth
Time. Under the influence of these combined stimulants
Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Ben Allen fell fast asleep for
Thirty miles, while Bob and Mr. Weller
Sang duets in the dickey.

Little, I trow, did Moses Pickwick, who once drove Dickens on the coach from the White Hart Inn at Bath, imagine from such chance circumstance that his surname would hereafter become a household word throughout the English-speaking world! And this reminds me that when touring in the eastern counties some years ago, the then landlord of the Angel Hotel at Bury St. Edmunds (may he still be alive and well, and may "his shadow never grow less!") showed us with manifest pride "the very room in which Mr. Pickwick slept there," and "the very carving knife and fork that he used at dinner. Ivory-mounted too they be, they go with the hotel, and were handed to me when I took it." Could Dickens ever have imagined this?

Writing upon the ever-attractive subject of old

inns, I noticed the following paragraph in the *Observer* of January 20, 1907, which I deemed of sufficient interest to cut out and preserve :—" Oliver Cromwell, who is descended from the Protector, was granted a license for the Red Lion Hotel at High Wycombe yesterday. A magistrate remarked that there was a John Hampden in the town, and that it might be well if Cromwell employed him as his cellarman. Another magistrate hoped Cromwell would not knock the ' King's Head off.' " Now it chanced, one evening on this journey, that I got a-chatting with a fellow-motorist over a post-prandial pipe in the bar of our inn, and he informed me that he had just driven from High Wycombe, where he had stayed overnight beneath the sign of the Red Lion there, having the said Oliver Cromwell for his host, and he strongly recommended both host and hotel to me. Then he searched for his pocket-book, and handed me a copy of a letter that the landlord of the Red Lion had received from Ireland ; this, in turn, I copied, and thus it runs :—

WATERFORD, *April 5th*, 1907.

TO MASTER OLIVER CROMWELL.

DEAR SIR—I saw in a paper called *The Caterer* your likeness, with a rigmarole, as how you say you are descended from that bloody ould blaggard what came over to this unfortunate country blazing around at all the churches with his blasted guns, carrying murder and slaughter into ivery corner of our land.

Now, I don't see you are much like that d—d ould rascal, as the pictures of him shows he had no whiskers and yours show you have a lot, that makes you look like one of the apostles we see on the glass windows of our chapels. Begorra, you haven't much

to brag about, being descended from such an ould carrion crow, and if you should iver come to this ould country, take me advice, and, by the hole in St. Patrick's coat, don't say your name or you'll maybe have to face the Divel at once. By the same token, if you iver come to Waterford ask for me at . . . and I'll be after giving you such a drop of dacent, honest whiskey as you never tasted before, for sure it niver saw the gauger—bad luck to him. —Yours affectionately,

.

For all I've wrote ye I would be plazed to have a line from ye.

Only the name and precise address of the writer, whether honest or assumed, I have omitted.

The next morning we awoke to find the sun already long risen and shining brilliantly down upon what, just then, appeared to us "the best of all possible worlds." "So to breakfast," as Mr. Pepys, of Diary renown, would say, and to the road again. Out of Tewkesbury there was only one way we had not previously gone, and this, leading northward toward the hill of Bredon, we took. We had not driven far before we found ourselves in the pleasant village of Bredon, and there a little off the road we caught sight of the great, grey stone roof of a large and manifestly very ancient building, a building that attracted our attention from its vast extent. Wondering what this could be we pulled up to inspect it, and found ourselves before a mighty tithe-barn, now forming portion of a prosperous-looking farmstead. The largest tithe barn we had ever come across: it has two gabled doorways for the corn-laden waggons to enter by, as though one would not suffice, and is unique, as far as I am aware, in the fact that over one of these is a

chamber with a fireplace. This chamber is reached by an outside stairway of stone, over which the roof, supported by oak posts, extends.

As we were setting up our camera to take a photograph of the building two boys appeared on the scene—the farmer's sons they turned out to be, and very intelligent and obliging boys they were, and seemed glad to talk with a stranger who professed an interest in their little world, and from them we learnt that they had made a boat out of some old boards, and had safely navigated the pond close by in it. Oh ! the joy of being young, when one can conjure a pond into an ocean, and a few boards into a ship to sail thereon ! As Oliver Wendell Holmes sings :—

Oh ! what are the pleasures we perish to win,
To the first little minnow we caught with a pin ?

“ It's a very old building,” exclaimed the eldest boy to us ; “ it is where the old monks used to store their corn. There be a room above them steps where one of the monks lived, and who used to count, from the window, the loads of corn coming in, to see there was no cheating. I'll take you up to see it if you like, only it's full of old lumber.” Truly, those old monks gathered though they had not sowed or reaped, and the size of the barn tells how plenteously they gathered, even if they filled but a quarter of it ! In the old monastic days the saying ran, “ Take heed of an ox before, an ass behind, and a monk on all sides,” which does not tell in favour of the monk.



GABLE OF BREDON TITHE BARN.

(SHOWING MONKS' STEPS.)

Then we were invited to inspect the interior of the barn, and we were struck by its vastness and its goodly proportions; truly, those old monks built with a purpose! Within, the structure suggested a cathedral in the rough, divided, as it was, church-like, into nave and aisles by two rows of pillars, only the pillars were of stout oak in place of stone: the walls only needed piercing with Gothic windows to form a mighty church. We could not but observe the warm and comfortable look of the solid posts of oak in contrast with the usually chilly appearance of the plain stone pillars that have place in ecclesiastical structures generally.

My photograph, unfortunately, fails to give any idea of the extent of this lordly tithe-barn, but I was more desirous of obtaining a picture of the chief gable than one of the whole of the building, so as to secure the quaint and unique monks' steps outside. That old tithe-barn told its own story. The monks, in spite of their worldly wisdom, had not learnt the art of taking tithe in coin in place of substance.

Leaving Bredon we soon came to Eckington, a small village with a broken wayside cross, but otherwise of not much interest, yet pleasing because of the absence of anything ugly; then we bore to the right, skirting the lonely hill of Bredon, concerning which a local proverb runs:—

When Bredon Hill puts on his cap,
We in the valley knows of that,

meaning that then it will surely rain. A farmer

assured me that he could tell the coming weather better by looking at Bredon Hill than by consulting any barometer. In another part of the country a parson told me that the local folk there foretold the weather with great certainty by a distant church steeple. When they could see this clearly in the morning it invariably rained some time during the day; when it was invisible or difficult to make out the following twenty-four hours were almost always fine.

Next after wandering amongst pleasant and winding lanes, shady with overhanging trees and tangled hedges, we found ourselves in the pretty half-timbered village of Elmley, where we discovered a quaint and comfortable-looking little inn displaying a wonderful pictured signboard, showing Queen Elizabeth on horseback with numerous attendants; below this was the date, "August 20, 1575." On inquiry we learnt that this was intended to commemorate the visit of "Good Queen Bess" to Elmley Castle (once a stately stronghold on the top of the steep hill above) during one of her many progresses. The drawing on the signboard, as might be expected, was somewhat crude, but the sun and rain had kindly toned down the colouring. There was a time when the painting of inn signs was a special profession, and men went round the country from one hostelry to another doing nothing else but refurbishing old signs or designing new ones. Even such a famous artist as J. F. Herring painted many a signboard in Yorkshire, and we are told that in the heyday of the coaching age some of the

flourishing landlords thought nothing of paying fifty pounds, and even considerably more, to the travelling artist for his work, besides giving him free board and lodgings whilst engaged upon it. Indeed, there existed then a Society of Sign-Painters, whose designs were even exhibited in London, and amongst the artists at different times were Hogarth, Gainsborough, Etty, Morland, and others. Some of these old signboards, much faded, are now in the hands of collectors, still even so they show to what a high standard the art of sign-painting had become. On a previous journey I chanced upon a gentleman who made a hobby of collecting these old signboards, besides the panels of old mail coaches, which he kindly showed me, and I was struck by the decorative quality and effective drawing of much of the former work. One of these by Herring, framed and glazed, was better done than many a present-day Academy picture. But the glory of the signboard is a thing departed, and its art is now that of the village painter. Perhaps, after all, it was a waste of talent to produce a work quickly ruined by rain and sunshine, and whose freshness did not last a year.

We asked our way to the ruined castle, and were directed to go through the churchyard, and then to climb the hill to it. In the churchyard we noticed an elaborately ornamented and pillared sun-dial, the carvings being deeply cut, though much weathered, but sundry coats-of-arms could be plainly made out around its base, though all this "pomp of heraldry" struck a note hardly in keeping with the solemnity

of the quiet God's acre where death makes all men equal.

Kneeling ne'er spoilt silk stocking: quit thy state.
All equal are within the church's gate.

The church doors being open, we were tempted to take a glance at the interior of the building, though, alas, we went as sight-seers, not as worshippers! On the wall by the porch we noticed some curious carvings, one representing a rabbit and another a pig, but the significance of these was beyond us. Within we noticed two finely sculptured monuments; one an alabaster altar-tomb to the Savage family, bearing the date of 1631, was especially noteworthy for the beautifully carved recumbent figures thereon; the very alabaster seemed to breathe. Truly the ancient master craftsman (whose forgotten name deserves as lasting a record as he has given to the dead) so

Smoothed and scraped

That mass he hammered on and hewed at, till he hurled
Life out of death and left a challenge.

Much of the interest in these old effigies lies in the fact that one beholds the likeness of the dead sleeping so silently below, so that one can gather, to a greater or less extent, the manner of the man he was when in the flesh, and from them one may also learn the varying and complex detail of ancient armour and the mode of wearing it, besides the changing costumes of the different periods. It may be the glamour of time that throws a halo of romance over things that are past; but whether

it be so or not, these ancient knights and ladies seem infinitely more picturesquely clad than do their descendants of to-day. Judging alone from these old monumental effigies, I should say that in the Elizabethan era the dress of both men and women had reached the zenith of picturesqueness. That beauty of dress can be without effeminacy in the wearer those days of bold adventure prove.

At the end of the churchyard the steep ascent to the grass-grown site of the former castle begins. From the top of the hill there is a wonderfully fine view, at least so we were informed by a man we found fishing in a lakelet just above the churchyard. We took his word for it, as the climb looked long and stiff; moreover, it was unsheltered from the baking sunshine and we felt lazy. We had, during our driving tours, seen quite a number of views, each claiming to be "the finest prospect in England," and as this did not profess to be amongst that lordly number, we felt no compunction in not "doing it." It was no part of our programme to go anywhere under compulsion.

The water of the lakelet looked so refreshingly cool that we were tempted to sit down in the grateful shade of some overhanging trees by its bank. For a good half-hour the fisherman patiently watched his line, but said nothing, and caught nothing. The fascination of fishing in still water, standing or sitting on the same spot for half a day, or longer, seems a strange thing to me, yet I have often seen grown-up men doing this with apparent satisfaction; it is the tamest sport I can imagine.

Just as we were leaving the fisherman turned round, and looking back and down over the adjoining churchyard, quietly exclaimed, *à propos* of nothing, "It must be an awful damp place to be buried in with this big pond above draining into it. Those old saints and sinners lying there must find it uncommonly damp, and one has to lie a long time dead. It's not a comfortable churchyard to be buried in." And he said all this without a smile. We merely nodded assent, but remained on to hear what else he might have to say ; we half expected that there was some story to follow, but nothing came of our waiting. Then we ventured the remark that perhaps the good folk buried there were past caring whether their last resting-place was damp or dry, but he was not to be drawn to gossip, merely responding, "You can't talk and fish, but you can smoke and fish." Whereupon he lighted his pipe and relapsed into silence, and seeing no profit in remaining longer we took our departure. We had manifestly come across a character, and hoped to extract some entertainment from him, but upon this occasion we failed.

CHAPTER XVI

The value of the imagination—An astonished tramp—A house of mystery—A quaint and picturesque old home—A conceit in clipped yews—The making of friends—A discovery—Epitaph to a lady “aged 309”!—The joy of the road—Historic ground—A spot for a pilgrim—Accidental fame—Belated and inn full—A leaning town—People and places.

FROM Elmley we made our way along tree-shaded lanes, and being in a lazy mood we let them lead us where they would. There is a certain fascination in invading the unknown; in that mystic region, though it be merely a bit of old England, to the poetic traveller Arcadia lies and tempts him ever on, for it is the zest of discovery rather than its realisation that is the charm of exploration. To travel without imagination is to rob travel of its chief allurements; without it you just depart, progress, and arrive. Even Napoleon realised the value of imagination. “*C'est l'imagination qui gouverne le genre humain*,” he once exclaimed. In a fresh country the mind delights in wondering what new surprise each coming bend in the road will reveal! The world is only commonplace to those who themselves are commonplace. In the historic days when Elizabeth was Queen, the bold,

brave men who ruled the seas for us, and made the Spanish Main a vain title, dreamed of golden cities in far-off Cathay and of wonderlands in the unknown West ; nor were they a whit the worse for all their dreaming. Without imagination the world would be a dreary place to live in, and the poet, painter, and novelist would find, like Othello, their occupation gone.

So with thoughts romantically inclined, by grace of the unromantic modern motor car, we traversed a pleasantly wooded country, sparsely inhabited and freshly green. On every hand the landscape was enfolded by gently sloping hills hazily outlined against the bright noon sky. The country had a mellow look, the cottages and farmsteads by the way were old, with a stay-at-home flavour about them, and over all the far-reaching prospect there brooded a settled calm. It was a purely agricultural country, soft and cultivated—a country where the raising of corn crops and the breeding of cattle and sheep is the only occupation—a country maternal, matured, and made beautiful by the tireless toil of centuries.

At last, after much quiet wandering, we came to a large village of some uninteresting modern cottages and some charming old houses by way of agreeable contrast ; but we were not tempted to stop there, for the roadway at the time was crowded with many romping children, and we did not care for such a noisy company ; indeed, the coming of our car disturbed a game of cricket that was being played in the centre of the street with much en-

thusiasm, to say nothing of sundry games of marbles. Of course it was annoying of us to spoil sport thus, but what else could we do? Curiously enough, the next village on the way, though of about the same size, appeared almost deserted, for we saw no one there but a deaf old man loitering in the very middle of the road who did not or would not hear the warning blast of our horn till we were close upon him, going as slowly as the car could go. "I beg pardon, mister," he shouted to us, "but I be a bit hard o' hearing." We assured him that the slight delay he had caused did not greatly matter, for we were in no special hurry, further venturing to suggest that as he was so deaf perhaps the middle of the road was, under such circumstances, not the safest place for him to meander in. But he only put his hand to his ear and repeated, "I be a bit hard o' hearing, and I be special bad to-day. You see I be an old man and poor, and I be mortal thirsty; maybe you be thirsty too with driving; now I can show you where you can get the best glass of ale as ever you tasted, and I would be delighted to drink both your very good healths."

How frequently it happens if you stop to talk with a man on the road it comes to this! Altogether I must have invested quite a nice little sum in having my health drunk when touring in England; perhaps that is why I enjoy such good health—anyhow the publican profits, for I have no doubt that the money goes to him. But on this occasion, by way of change, I put my hand to my ear and pretended "to be hard o' hearing" too and drove on.

Perhaps I might have parted with the customary twopence, and have received the usual blessing in return, but I had a suspicion that the man had tasted ale before that day, and that he was more fuddled than deaf, therefore I thought my money could be better invested.

Much experience of thirsty tramps has caused me to foreknow almost exactly what they are going to say to me, so later on that day when one accosted me with the preliminary touch of his cap I anticipated him by myself exclaiming, "I be mortal thirsty; have you, good sir, the price of a glass of ale about you? I've driven already nearly fifty miles to-day, and since the morning not a bite of food has passed my lips," and the look of utter astonishment that tramp gave me was a delight to observe. But the average tramp is a man of ready resource, and seeing I was a hopeless case, he rose to the occasion and promptly exclaimed, with what dignity he could command and with a comically serious expression, "If there were a policeman in sight I would give you in charge for begging; that I would"! The tramp is not easily repressed, and we realised the truth of the ancient proverb, "Who dips with the devil must need have a long spoon."

Our conversation had so engrossed our attention that we all but missed noting a large and ancient house that faced the village street and a little retired therefrom behind a high stone wall that enclosed a neglected garden. When we did note it the house impressed us; it was a large and somewhat important building, its walls were time-

stained and worn, and upon its lichen-laden and moss-grown roof stood a big bell-turret boldly outlined against the sky. But the curious thing about it was that every window we could see, and they were of good size and many, were all built up, yet smoke was slowly rising from one solitary chimney as though the place were inhabited. It might have done duty for Hood's "Haunted House," for it had a veritable haunted look: to us it was a house of mystery, but there was not a soul visible in that deserted village to afford us any information about it, and we hardly liked to knock at a door to ask, so after waiting a short time we proceeded on our way, left to our own conjectures. We could only presume that possibly the windows had been built up long ago to evade the iniquitous window tax; but why *all* the windows? There was the mystery, and why had not even one of them since been reopened? It may be remembered that in "the good old days," besides a window tax there was a chimney tax. On both light and warmth the Government took toll! There is a curious allusion to the latter in the parish churchyard at Folkestone, where an epitaph to Rebecca Rodgers, spinster (who died on August 22, 1688), may be found, and thus it runs:—

A house she hath, it's made in such good fashion,
The tenant ne'er shall pay for reparation,
Nor will her landlord ever raise her rent
Or turn her out of doors for non-payment;
From chimney money too this cell is free,
Of such a house who would not tenant be.

Then followed an open stretch of country that gave small promise of entertainment, but the wayfarer never knows what good things may be in store ahead, and so it chanced, as often it did, that an agreeable surprise awaited us, for quite unexpectedly our road led into a quaint, old-world, stone-built village of many curious houses, and this, we learnt, was Cleeve Prior. A spot to delight both the eye of the artist and the antiquary with its look of ancient peace and picturesqueness. Passing by the King's Head there, an inn of the long ago, we noticed the big gabled end of its stables was full of pigeon-holes, whilst many grey and white pigeons fluttering around showed that it was still of service; then we suddenly discovered ourselves before one of the most delightfully picturesque old homes the mind could conceive—a home one could hardly expect to find out of a picture, yet there it stood a happy reality—a painter's dream realised. Long shall I remember the thrill of pleasure that the vision of this poem in stone gave to us: had we seen nothing else on the tour, the journey would have been well worth the taking for that one revelation of the beautiful!

In front of this "Haunt of ancient peace" was a low stone wall draped with ivy, and from a shapely wooden gate therein a flagged pathway led through a fantastically cut and carefully trimmed yew avenue to the old home, whose grey gables peeped pleasantly above the dark greenery, and, to complete the past-time picture, by the side of the gateway stood an old-fashioned mounting-block. We at once set to



CLEEVE PRIOR.

work to photograph this rare and delightful specimen of an English home of bygone days, which photograph is here reproduced, and though, alas, it does scant justice to the charm of the original, still in some measure it conveys an idea, poor though it be, of the quaint old place and its garden. It is a spot, however, to be seen rather than described or pictured, for there is a glamour about it that is only revealed to the eye.

That venerable yew avenue, we were told, was trained and clipped by the ancient monks who once possessed the manor; and Cleeve Prior, the name of the house, suggests a former religious foundation. There are eight yew trees on either side of the avenue, which are joined together by branching arms, and these trees, tradition asserts, were intended to represent the twelve Apostles and the four Evangelists—a quaint conceit of the monks, who had ever a strong leaning towards the fanciful. Blomfield, in his *Formal Garden of England*, mentions a similar conceit in clipped yew that may be found “at Packwood, in Warwickshire, where,” he says, “the sermon on the mount is literally represented in yew. . . . At the end of the garden stand four yews for the four Evangelists, and six more on either side for the twelve Apostles.” I came upon this extract when searching in that work for any particulars about the garden at Cleeve Prior, of which, however, Blomfield, strangely enough, only makes passing mention in one line. Possibly he had never visited the place, and did not care to write about what he had not actually seen. At any

rate, the fact that another avenue of yews, thus fantastically cut, still exists (and there are possibly others) proves that the idea was not unique.

As we were packing up our camera the tenant of the place came to us, and we soon got into a friendly chat with him. Oftentimes during our tour, as in this instance, the taking of a photograph proved the informal means of an introduction to strangers. Finding the great interest we took in his charming old home, the tenant kindly suggested that perhaps we would like to take a glance at the interior, an invitation we gladly accepted. Again we felt how good fortune followed us wherever we went. Even though greatly tempted, we should never have ventured to be so bold as to beg permission to see over a total stranger's home, yet here again we were actually solicited to do so! Approaching the house through the yew avenue, our attention was called to an inscription, which I take to be old Norman French, cut in the stone above the porch, that runs—

DWE·ETTE·MWNE·DROITE

This, we were told, had only recently been discovered, it having been for long years overgrown and hidden by ivy. Now, however beautiful ivy may look climbing over an ancient building, and though it frequently protects it from dampness and decay, it possesses the disadvantage of concealing many interesting architectural details. The interior of the house disappointed us, for it has been so altered and modernised as to have lost much of its interest and most of its ancient picturesqueness. In this

respect the interiors of many old homes have suffered far more than their exteriors. We were shown one oak-panelled chamber hung round with the painted portraits of ancestors, and actually the oak in this had been grained over in imitation of maple—and badly grained too! It is a dispiriting thing to find these old-time interiors thus uglified.

Once when belated on the road I found a warm welcome beneath the sign of the White Lion at Cobham, and was shown into a cosy, old oak-panelled room there. This, I was told, had only recently been discovered by the removal of many layers of wall-papers, the accumulation of long years! Indeed, for an unknown time the panelling had been lost to sight and memory. It seems passing strange that any one should have plastered over good honest oak work with mere paper; or even, as in the case of Cleeve Prior, have painted it in poor imitation of another wood. But in the past years of grace, if not of taste, such things were done, and not infrequently. An oak-panelled wall, even when unadorned with pictures, never looks bare, and always has a comfortable and furnished appearance, nor is it in the long-run an expensive fitting, as it lasts for generations, improves with age, and never requires attention or renewing. Moreover, the varied graining of oak is essentially decorative and vastly more pleasing to the eye than the monotonously repeated pattern of even the most artistic wall-paper, or the uninteresting sameness of a painted surface.

The interior of Cleeve Prior did not long detain

us, for the charm of the place lies without. Perhaps the only interesting feature remaining within is a cramped priest's hiding-hole, but this is a small item to conjure with. One great reason why the interiors of so many old houses fail to please or satisfy the eye—even when they have been allowed to retain unaltered their panelled walls, recessed and mullioned windows, beamed ceilings, and great open fireplaces intact—is, I imagine, that their picturesque effect is generally more or less ruined by modern and unsuitable furniture and fittings, so sadly out of harmony with their surroundings. In such a matter you cannot “put new wine into old bottles” with any hope of artistic success.

Upon leaving the house we asked, and readily obtained, permission to wander over the old-time garden and about the time-worn colony of rambling farm buildings that are set on one side of the manor in ample spaciousness. Amongst the latter we noticed a large, circular, stone-built pigeon-cote, with a curious little turret set on the top of its rounded and pointed roof, and a dormer window projecting therefrom. A simple bit of building, well proportioned, and pleasant to look upon. But those old monks built everything picturesquely, be it as lowly as a boundary wall, or as lordly as an abbey. Even the store-rooms above the humble cart-sheds were approached by outer stairways, protected from the weather by side roofs upheld on stout oak posts, a quaint arrangement that gave a touch of character to what would otherwise have been plain and featureless.

Then we wandered into the churchyard close by in search of curious epitaphs ; nor were we wholly unrewarded, as the following inscription, to be found on a weathered tombstone there, may show :—

Here lieth the body of
Sara Charlett
The Daughter of Richard Charlett
Who departed this Life
The 6th day of October
Anno Domini 1693
Aged 309.

God who by death doth grief assuage,
Took me away in my flourishing age,
To rest i' th' grave free from pain,
Till Christ shall bid me rise again.

Truly, 309 years is an astonishing time to live ; but I imagine that the central cipher must have been inserted by some strange blunder. It could hardly have been placed there for ornament. The age was too wonderful for us to wonder about. Still, if a mistake, it is an amazing one, and if it were, the puzzle is why it was never corrected. But in the “good old days” our country-dwelling forefathers were not always over particular as to the wording or the figuring of epitaphs, for more than once I have noted that the name of the underlying dead has been actually differently spelt in one short tombstone inscription ! You cannot place implicit confidence upon any epitaph—perhaps no one expects to do so ; but the following curiously self-contradictory one I came across a few years ago takes a lot of beating : “ Here

lies the body of Dash, mariner, who was buried at sea"!

Returning to the manor-house we were about to remount the car and proceed on our way, when our host came up to us and remarked, "Now you are here, you really ought to stroll down and have a look at Cleeve Mill, on the Avon. It is barely a quarter of a mile away, and is a most lovely spot." Manifestly our host possessed an artistic soul; moreover, he offered to go with us, which offer we gratefully accepted. Thus by happy fortune, and the good-nature of the various country people we chanced upon from time to time, we made discovery of many a beauty-spot that otherwise we should have missed.

The glory of road-travel, so opposed to the unsociable railway rush, is that it brings you into such intimate touch with country dwellers, and also affords you time to chat with them; for, as I have before remarked, you can loiter in a motor car as well as make haste. On the road you come in contact with all kinds of people, but you have the power to select your company. As Montaigne remarked, "I found, when travelling, that every man I met knew something I did not know, therefore I engaged him in conversation." And the doing of this adds vastly to the interest and the profit of a journey. To find a stranger and to make a friend, if only for the moment, that is the joy and the art of travel. We were never dull for lack of company any day on the journey. Sings a poet sadly :—

A crust of bread, and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile, and an hour to weep in ;
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh; but the moans come double—
And this is life.

But it is not the life of the open road, for such a life spells rude health, and makes havoc of "Dull Care"; he is not allowed even to take a back seat on such a journey—he is forgotten!

It was a pleasant walk down to "the river of song" and of wooded beauty. At the crest of the hill, just before we began the descent, we came to a spot whereon stands a ruined wayside cross, a prominent and elevated position, which would have made an ideal site for a feudal castle,—indeed, the wonder to us was why no medieval baron had seized it for the building of one,—from thence the extensive view over the smiling country-side, chequered by verdant meadows, tilled fields, and spreading woodlands, with here and there a glimpse of the grey gables of some ancient home half drowned in foliage, formed a veritable feast of loveliness for the eye, brightened as the scene was by the soft sunshine filtering down on it through the fleecy summer clouds above. Possibly it was the vision of some such fair landscape that caused George Borrow to exclaim, "What a beautiful country is England! People run abroad to see beautiful countries, and leave their own behind, unknown, unnoticed—their own most beautiful!" And our whole journey was a revelation of lovely landscapes.

"A battle once was fought on the ground around

where the cross stands," exclaimed our host; "now and then the bones of men and rusty weapons of war are turned up by the plough." But the name of the battle he did not know, and we conjectured that possibly it had some connection with the famous fight of Evesham, which pleasant town is only a few miles off. Now a great peace, an almost solemn silence, reigns around the site of a forgotten fight. Possibly the cross was erected there to the memory of the fallen, but the cross itself is crumbling to decay, and little else than its weather-worn base remains.

Then by a narrow and rutty road, high banked on either side, we made a steep descent to Cleeve Mill—a spot to see and to remember ever after; a spot as beautiful as gliding, silvery river, falling water, overarching leafy trees, and ancient building with the bloom of centuries thereon, could make it. On one gable-end of the old mill were a number of dove holes, and doves were lazily resting upon its lichen-laden roof, cooing accompaniment to the droning of the water-wheel, the murmuring of the drowsy wind amongst the foliage that mingled with the musical melody of the weir. The peaceful calm and beauty of the spot impressed us; there the rest-seeking pilgrim could "dream down hours to moments," if he chose to waste time so, in utter oblivion of the noisy, striving outer world.

"That old mill," said our companion, "was mentioned in the Domesday Book, and once it belonged to the monks, who always had an eye for the picturesque as well as the profitable. Last year an



CLEEVE MILL, ON THE AVON.

Academician spent a month with his easel in yonder field painting a big picture of it." Truly, no landscape painter could have desired a more delightful subject for his brush, and I trust he did it justice. "Now I must leave you," exclaimed our courteous guide, "and get back to the missus." Whereupon he bid us good-day, and we regretted the inevitable parting. So as we wandered on, we were ever making friends, possibly never to see them again ; but the thing was, we made friends, and that of itself is a delight—

Like as a plank of driftwood
Tossed on the watery main,
Another plank encounters,
Meets, touches, and parts again ;
Thus 'tis with men for ever,
On life's uncertain sea—
They meet, they greet, and sever,
Drifting eternally.

Down by the river-bank we found a sheltered and shady nook whereon to rest and to leisurely drink in the beauty of the scene. Unfortunately we had left our paint-box and sketching-block in the car ; but, fortunately, we had carried our hand-camera with us, and so were able to secure several pleasing photographs of the old mill and the river winding away into the wooded distance, one of which is here reproduced. But, at the best, a photograph can only suggest some of the charm of the spot ; it lacks the glamour of its rich, yet soft colouring, and leaves wholly to the imagination to supply the cool, musical gurgling of the quiet-flowing

stream, the plashing wash of the water falling over the weir, the whispering of the wind amongst the trees, not to mention the gladsome song of birds—for it is not only what the eye sees that charms, but Nature's soothing melodies that greet the ear bear their part, perhaps unconsciously, in impressing the mind with a sense of dreamy pleasure, a something very actual, yet not to be defined. The real reward of travel is the gathering of impressions that are incommunicable in words, and "what need" is there "of words to tell of things unreached of words?" Lawrence Sterne made *A Sentimental Journey through France*; why should not one make a sentimental journey through England?

Leaving the old mill to its peaceful seclusion, we strolled back to the car and proceeded along the first road we came to, neither knowing nor caring whither it led. For a space the country had a bare and open look. The river was lost to sight, but in time we came to it again at a spot where it was crossed by an old stone bridge of many arches, each differing in shape and size and having big buttresses between. An ancient structure, worn and weather-stained, and oddly patched here and there with red bricks. But in spite of its crumbling stones and rude patching-up, the century-old bridge looked strong and substantial, and formed such a pleasing picture that we involuntarily pulled up simply to look at it.

On the other side of the river we found ourselves in Shakespeare's "Drunken Bidford"; but it appeared very staid and sober then, as prim and

proper as a place can be. That unreliable jade, Dame Rumour, asserts that Shakespeare was wont to resort to the old Falcon tavern there at a time when Bidford was noted for its toppers. Beyond Bidford we passed through a tame and uninteresting country given over wholly to farming, and next we turned up at "Papist Wixford," slumbering in the sunshine, apparently unconscious of the fame cast upon it by the poet's much-quoted epigram. After this a pleasant spin along a smooth wide road brought us to the ancient little town of Alcester. The day was drawing to its end, and the question arose, Should we stop the night there or proceed farther? The town was clean and neat, and the inn there looked not uninviting; but somehow Alcester did not attract us; it lacked character, so we drove away. Presently we espied a signpost by the roadside, and thought we might as well discover where we were going; to our dismay we read thereon "To Birmingham." Now, to the Black Country we were not minded to go, neither did we feel inclined to return to Alcester; therefore we called a halt and consulted our map. Presently our eyes alighted on Droitwich, and thither we determined to make for, having agreeable remembrances of the Raven there, a half-timbered hostelry with a pleasant garden in the rear. It was the recollection of the garden that decided us—to the Raven we would go. The next thing was to puzzle out the road to Droitwich, for the signposts did not help us, so we had to steer by compass as well as we could and the winding byways would allow. At

any rate we took good care to give the Black Country a wide berth; wherever we might eventually arrive, we determined it would not be there.

Through a pleasant country, well wooded and moderately hilly, we pursued our way, and eventually reached Droitwich. Now Droitwich, be it confessed, is an ugly town, though set in the heart of a lovely country; a town with many of its houses awry, and some even sinking slowly into the ground, as though it had experienced an earthquake or was reeling under a drunken fit—an unfortunate state of affairs due to the long and extensive pumping of the brine from below, which has caused the ground above to give way. But we came to Droitwich, not for the sake of the place, but because of its comfortable hostelry: most people come to Droitwich for the baths!

Pulling up at the Raven with pleasant anticipations of finding comfortable quarters there, the manageress greeted us with a smile of welcome; possibly it was an acquired smile with which she freely greeted all comers; nevertheless, it is a pleasant thing to be so received. An agreeable manner costs the bestower nothing, but it oils the wheels of life wonderfully. The landlord of the old coaching inn was a past master in the art of welcoming his guests. Of him it has been said, "He received the traveller on his steps with a *bonhomie* which caused the traveller to forget that the roof was that of a stranger, and had a tact in forestalling the want of his guest in accordance with his rank and purse that made the bill a mere in-

cident of the visit, not, as is too often the case, the leading feature in a brief but troubled pilgrimage." Now that we are beginning to travel by the old roads again, and to stop at the wayside inns, as our ancestors did of yore, it is to be hoped that the modern landlord will revive the ancient courtesy of his class. The railway but too successfully abolished the comfortable old English inn, and gave us in place the big modern hotel, with a stony-eyed manager, where every guest loses his individuality in a number—a poor exchange, in truth. Let us trust that the motor car will be the cause of reviving the homely and comfortable inn wherein our forefathers took their ease. That, to a certain extent, it has already accomplished this, I can testify.

But I have been wandering from the point. The manageress's ready smile of welcome proved, alas, illusive. "I'm so sorry," exclaimed she, "but we've not a room vacant. We are over-full, and I've had to turn several arrivals away already to-day." And she appeared so genuinely sorry at being unable to accommodate us, that we felt even more sorry for her than for our own disappointment. As she explained, "It's not pleasant to have to send visitors away. I don't know how it is," she continued, "but such a number of people appear to be suffering from rheumatism and gout this year, more than usual, and they come here to be cured. We've been full for a long time past." At least we were better off than the comfortably-housed hotel guests, for we suffered from nothing worse than a disappointment and an agreeable tiredness.

For the moment we felt sorry that we had passed Alcester so scornfully by. The light was fading fast from earth and sky, and we needs must fare forth in the coming darkness on roads unknown in quest of quarters for the night. Then we blessed the motor car for its quality of endurance. Like Tennyson's "Brook" it would "go on for ever," or at least as long as its driver desired it to go. Had we been touring with horses we might not have been able to proceed farther, and have found ourselves in a quandary. Again we consulted our map. It was late, and we agreed that the best thing to do was to make for the nearest town, and thankfully accept what accommodation it could give us. Belated travellers cannot afford to be too exacting as to quarters. Our map showed Kidderminster to be the nearest town, some ten miles away, not a serious distance on a car; and though we knew Kidderminster to be commercial and unromantic, it would probably provide us with a good hotel, so with renewed expression of regrets from the manageress of the Raven, we departed into the gathering gloom.

Kidderminster was kinder to us than we dared to expect, for she treated us to a comfortable old-fashioned coaching hostelry, set right in the centre of the town. We fully expected something modern and glaring; we were agreeably disappointed. The landlord was a pattern of civility, the landlady most obliging, the beribboned waitress attentive. The boots actually beamed at us, though the ancient ostler looked doubtfully at the motor car and called

it "a thing"; but, fortunately, motor cars have no feelings. "This be a business town," exclaimed he. "We don't get many tourists in motor cars here; we still believe in horses in Kiddy." We apologised for the car, but explained that his tip would be the same as though we had arrived with a horse, provided he would stable it decently, and that was all we would ask of him; and this he did. Within we fared sumptuously. The landlady said if we would leave it to her she would provide us with "a nice little dinner," and she was as good as her word. Possibly hunger added sauce to our late meal; but the cooking of it appeared to us to be super-excellent. Kidderminster (shortened by some of its worthy inhabitants to "Kiddy," and further shortened on more than one signpost, we noticed with amusement, to the irreducible minimum of "Kid"!) is not a beautiful town to look upon; but you cannot judge people by the place they live in. In some of the hard-featured, uncompromisingly ugly manufacturing towns of the North Country, at hotels bearing a most uninviting exterior, we have found the warmest of welcomes and the best of treatment.

CHAPTER XVII

English villages—A moated manor-house—The picturesque past—
New men and old acres—A deserted home—An out-of-the-way
spot—A stranger's curious story—A mystery explained—A
remote hamlet—A timber-towered church—A dealer in old
houses—The gentle art of transplanting ancient buildings.

LEAVING Kidderminster, we proceeded southward by a wide and open road, and through a country pleasant to look upon, but unstimulating. Nothing of the scenery now remains in my memory but "a succession of trees and green fields," to again borrow Dr. Johnson's much-quoted expression. The morning was hazy—the distance was blotted out by grey mists—so that our horizon was limited, and no charming peeps of the far-away blue helped to vary the prospect or to give a spur to the imagination, for to behold a beautiful distance is to create a desire to reach it.

So we travelled on uneventfully till we reached Ombersley, a village of black-and-white half-timbered cottages with an hostelry to match. Mostly genuine antiques are these cottages, though some are modern ; but the latter have happily been built in reverent imitation of their older neighbours, so that the harmony of the place is as little disturbed as possible

by the juxtaposition of the ancient with the new. I would that other English villages had their past picturesqueness as carefully considered and preserved. How delightful is a time-mellowed old English village, gathered round its century-hallowed fane, to the glance of the eye; a village that has never known the hand of the modern builder, and that seems almost as though it had stepped out of a picture; a village such as Mrs. Allingham and Birket Foster loved to paint, and Kate Greenaway to put into the background of her drawings, and where one feels that there ought really to be a maypole on the green, as there was in the days of yore! And many such a village still remains to us.

Ombersley suggested to us a place with a history, but nothing particular appears to have happened there, not even a stray struggle between the Royalists and the Roundheads; no novelist, as far as I am aware, has immortalised it; no one of importance has, by the chance of circumstance, either been born or died there, to give it fame and cause its picturesqueness to be better known, which is a pity! People who become famous have no control over their birthplaces, otherwise they might, for the sake of future pilgrims thereto, select picturesque spots for such events. Quite a number of notable personages, by the perversion of Fate, have made their first appearance in the world in houses and localities that are not inspiring to look upon. The novelist has the advantage of being able to order his characters where he will, and so invite attention to many a beauty-spot that would otherwise remain unknown.

To the novelist I commend Ombersley and some of the quaint old houses we came upon that day; but then, again, a writer must needs feel the charm of a place before he can convey it to others, and we do not all see alike. In proof of this, it is both interesting and instructive to read the accounts of familiar spots by different authors, and so to learn how they appear to other eyes.

Beyond Ombersley we steered a course to the west in order to explore a corner of the land left by the railway and by the motorist to its ancient tranquillity. We wandered along tree-shaded country lanes, passing by many a rambling old farmstead and many a pretty cottage; but though all was beautiful, from the sky above (now free from haze) to the earth below, the scenery was without special distinction, and for several pleasant miles we found nothing on our way to tempt us to call a halt. In this we were disappointed, for in that district, out of sight and sound of the railway, we fully expected to make some interesting discoveries. Our disappointment, however, was not of long duration, for as we were driving down a lonely lane we presently espied ahead, peeping over some surrounding trees close to the roadside, the great gables and shapely chimney-stacks of an ancient and stately home that had manifestly, in its day, been a house of importance. As we approached the spot we noticed that the house had a time-worn appearance, its lichen-laden roofs being bent with age, its half-timbered work being bleached almost white with the summer suns and winter storms of centuries,

its weather-stained walls being patched up here and there,—all plainly telling of the ravages of the years that had passed over it. The old building had quite a pathetic look, even when seen from some way off; it needed no second glance to learn that its glory had departed. Its builder has been dead and dust ages ago; his very name has probably gone out of local remembrance, but there still stands the ancient hall of him who may have been “the lord of all the landscape round, even to its last horizon.”

Pulling up at a gate by the roadside, almost opposite to the grey old gabled home, a short stroll across a rough-grassed meadow and along a foot-marked track brought us to this romance in building—a picture rather than a place. It was “a dreamy house,” and but for the minor details of thatched roof, of shaking poplar “hard by,” and “level waste around,” it might well have stood for Tennyson’s “lonely moated grange.” As Byron sings—

There is given
Unto the things of earth which Time hath bent,
A spirit’s feeling; and where he hath leant
His hand, but broke his scythe, there is a power
And magic in the ruined battlement,
For which the palace of the present hour
Must yield its pomp, and wait till ages are its dower.

So strongly at times does the picturesque past predominate over the prosaic present. We found the old home to be surrounded by a wide and weedy moat whose banks were overgrown with tangled wood. The house had a strangely deserted look,

notwithstanding that some of its windows were open, and so presumably it was inhabited. A great silence reigned around; there was no sign of life about, not even a dog to bark at us. We walked up to the house by a bridge across the moat, but the door was closed, and a knock at it brought forth no response, only a hollow mocking echo from within.

No human figure stirr'd to go or come,
No face looked forth from shut or open casement;
No chimney smoked—there was no sign of home
From parapet to basement.

The place depressed us with a sense of melancholy in spite of its picturesqueness, for a past presence seemed to haunt it—an inscrutable something that we realised but could not explain. It made a beautiful picture, but it was the beauty of decay. It brought to mind the lines that the builder of Abbotsford was so fond of repeating to himself—

Earth builds upon earth
Castles and towers;
Earth says to the earth
All shall be ours.

But away with moralising; it profits little after all that is said, even children of to-day decline to read a book with a moral. We next proceeded to take some photographs of the ancient house, but, owing to the tangled growth of wood around, the taking of these presented some difficulty. By no means in our power could we get the building and the moat in a single picture; to secure the one we had to sacrifice the other. The photograph reproduced



HUDDINGTON COURT.

here shows one of its weather-beaten gables and an ornamented chimney-stack, the moat being effectually hidden by the thick foliage below, that prevented even a peep of it.

We afterwards discovered the name of the place to be Huddington Court, but of its early owners or its history we could glean nothing certain, and upon consulting a hand-book to the county on our return home we failed to find any mention of the place therein; indeed, it would have surprised us had we done so, for what concern have hand-books with picturesque old homes unless they have become famous? Ruskin once exclaimed that "the modern Englishman does not care a straw for the picturesque or he would never have built modern London." But things are changing for the better, and London too; at least nowadays we show regard for the picturesque, and even go far afield in search of it!

Perhaps happily one day Huddington Court may find an admiring purchaser who will restore it backwards to the scheme and intention of its ancient builder, as near as may be, and so make it into a delightful home, fit for a lord to dwell in. Many a beautiful but neglected old house, and some gone to all but hopeless ruin, that we have come upon when exploring the remote nooks and corners of England, we have found on a second visit to have been meanwhile fortunately discovered by some lover of the past, and by him carefully restored and preserved for future generations to admire, but not modernised, and so converted into a charming abode, whilst

retaining all the flavour of antiquity. Not a few of these new owners of old Tudor, Elizabethan, or Jacobean houses have proved to be Americans! who, of all the world, are perhaps the most enthusiastic and appreciative admirers of bygone English homes.

One of the most delightfully picturesque (within as well as without) small Elizabethan mansions I know—a veritable poem in gables, clustering chimneys, and mullioned windows, surrounded, too, by a very dream of a garden with quaintly clipped yew hedges, moss-grown sun-dials, bowling-green, terraces, and lily-padded ponds, gay besides with sweet-smelling, old-fashioned flowers—is owned and inhabited by an American, who greatly enjoys living in it; and less than twenty miles away he introduced me to another American who had likewise purchased a half-timbered and moated house of the same Elizabethan days, which had been well restored and refurnished in a manner suitable to that period, much of the furniture being of sixteenth-century make, and the rest a careful copy of the old. To go into that house is like stepping back centuries, for therein you may readily indulge in the illusion that by some magic the hand of Time has suddenly been reversed, that the past alone is real, the present but a dream!

In *Fors Clavigera* Ruskin thus upbraids us: “That you do not care for dying Venice is a sign of your own ruin, and that the Americans do not care for dying England is the only sign of their inferiority to her.” Surely times have changed

since this was written, or Ruskin then was wrong? Not only do cultured Englishmen care for Venice, but cultured Americans show much loving care for the old historic land of their forefathers, some even to the returning there and the making it their home again!

I cannot reason why—indeed, for some things no reason can be given—but the vision of an old moat-surrounded manor-house, aged and worn, never fails to thrill me; there always seems to linger a sentiment of romance about such an ancient place. The “moat defensive” tells of other times, less desirable to live in, doubtless, than these, but infinitely more picturesque. Were I a novelist of the old school I should feel impelled to start my story with a moated grange. Huddington Court fulfils my ideal in this respect, and it calls for romance as a ruin does for ivy; the background is there, only the characters are needed! The traditional flight of Dorothy Vernon with her lover from Haddon Hall suggests a motive for an opening chapter, and the moat suggests an added detail of difficulty and of the picturesque that appeals to the imagination. Dull must be the mind of a man who could see no poetry about such a time-dimmed home as this. It is just possible that there may be some stirring story connected with it only waiting to be unearthed; that we did not unearth one, if one there be, was not our fault, for whilst on the spot we were unable, even after much searching, to find a soul to gossip with. The very loneliness of the place added a sense of mystery to it.

You cannot always wander round about an ancient home of such distinction, and its immediate locality, and not come upon a solitary being, not even a country lad. We actually travelled some considerable distance therefrom before we met a human being to speak to, and this in populous England! Even when we did meet one and questioned him, he only knew the place by name and nothing more about it, and the farther we travelled the more hopeless became our quest. It is astonishing how limited is the horizon of the majority of country folk. At one inn on the road I asked the ostler (who told me he had been there for seventeen years) of the road some six miles on, and he actually declared that he knew nothing about it excepting that he had heard "as how it were very hilly." Nor was this a singular instance of the kind.

If I want information about a road I always seek it, when possible, of a cyclist, for he appears to be the only man in the country who travels. One farmer who I chanced upon expressed to me his strong disapproval of cycles. "They encourage," said he, "the young folks to wander all over the country instead of staying contentedly at home, and you never know where your girls get to a-roving on them things." And I have come across aged country folk in remote districts who have told me that they have never travelled by railway, "and never want to." Had they known it they might have quoted Ruskin to support their views, for of railways he wrote from Coniston to a friend on 1st March 1887: "They are to me the loathsomest

form of devilry now extant . . . carriages of damned souls riding on the ridges of their own graves," which is certainly forcible enough, even for Ruskin. It happened some time after this letter was written that I spent the evening with an old friend of Ruskin's, and I ventured to ask him how that famous author travelled from Coniston to London, presuming, after such an expression of opinion, that he naturally went by road, and I was curious to learn whether he drove himself the whole of the way, or whether he managed to post it in the good old-fashioned manner. Somewhat to my surprise I was told that Ruskin went by train, "as every one else does." Wordsworth also indited bitter sonnets against railways, yet a letter of his exists that may cause the Philistine to smile, for therein Wordsworth asks advice about investing some of his money "in the railway companies" then being promoted! Which difference between brave preaching and practice calls to mind a pointed remark that a countryman once made to me after morning service in a village country church. I had been praising the sermon to him, and he responded, "Our parson do preach fine, that's what everybody do say; and if you go by his preaching you won't go far wrong, but if you go by his doings you will." Becoming afterwards acquainted with the parson, I hinted to him in a jocular manner the substance of what I had heard, but he was equal to the occasion. "You see," exclaimed he, "I'm sometimes off duty!"

Huddington Court is set away in the wilds of Worcestershire, far from main roads, and farther

still from towns, not easy to discover, I should imagine, unless one is provided with a reliable large-scale map. We came upon it by accident, as we did upon most of the good things of our journey. There is an old saying I remember of a remote Derbyshire hamlet that "no stranger is ever seen there unless he has lost his way." Of Huddington Court the same dictum might equally apply. Like Hood we had found "a deserted mansion," but it was not by "a thought's expansion"; ours was a picturesque reality, a ballad in building, not a poet's dream—a "something more than fiction." How much greater is the charm of coming unexpectedly upon a bit of old-world romance like this than having it provided second-hand by novelist or painter! The romantic reality that is so rare, and perhaps, because of its rarity, always more strongly impresses the mind than the ideal, however beautiful the ideal may be,—the actual sight gives life, it presents a solid picture that is not vague, a something to recall with a sense of deep refreshment in after-days when, perchance, one is wandering along the thronged city's dusty streets with smoke-stained buildings all around. Not the least of the joys of travel is the recollection of pleasant spots and picturesque places seen, and that are treasured in the mind's gallery, a precious possession as long as memory lasts! Rural England is only a half-explored country. Hidden away in odd nooks and corners of it are beauty-spots innumerable, waiting to be discovered by the leisurely traveller; and how great is the pleasure of making these discoveries! He who is

guide-book led and clings to the beaten track misses much. Moreover, the perfect guide-book remains to be composed; even did it exist it would destroy the chief charm of travel, which is the coming upon the unexpected!

Whilst writing upon the attractive subject of old-world homes, legend-haunted or otherwise, I am tempted to relate a very strange story that was told to me, in all apparent sincerity, by an artist I met a little later on the journey. We had dined together at the same table at our inn, and, being of kindred tastes, we had quickly become on a friendly footing. He confided to me that he was tramping about country with knapsack and sketch-book in search of picturesque old houses, of which he made a special study. "After dinner," said he, "I will show you my sketch-books, and we can exchange notes about the various interesting old places we have discovered." We were the only occupants of the smoke-room that evening, and over a post-prandial pipe spent a pleasant time together gossiping about our mutual hobby; whilst I further enjoyed inspecting his charming sketches of quaint and picturesque old buildings, and odds and ends of architectural tit-bits. So we chatted on till late, when, lighting his third pipe, he suddenly exclaimed, "Now I should like to tell you a most curious thing that once happened to me, though I fear you will not credit a word of it." I waited for him to proceed, but he merely smoked on meditatively. "Let's have your story," I exclaimed, "I'm an old traveller and prepared for anything." But he

appeared loth to begin, and so the more raised my curiosity. Eventually, however, having first rung for a "whisky-and-soda," his second one, he started his strange relation, which I here repeat, from memory, as closely and faithfully as I can. "Last year," said he, "I was on a sketching expedition in Devonshire, and after a long day's tramp found a quiet country inn where I secured a room for the night. Having done this I set out for a short stroll before the daylight went; presently wandering along a lane I came to a long and high stone wall, which I followed for some distance till I noticed some rusty wrought-iron gates between two tumble-down stone pillars; the gates were fastened by a chain, and did not appear to have been opened for a long time. Glancing through the gate I saw a deserted-looking park, and in it, half hidden by some trees, a wonderfully picturesque old house. I climbed over the wall and made my way to this, and began a hasty sketch of it, determining to go there again in the morning and make a more careful drawing at my leisure." Then he selected one of his sketch-books, and turning over the leaves showed me the sketch he had made. It was a clever pencil outline of a delightfully picturesque, many-gabled, ivy-clad building, long and low; the roof was bent, and in places the rafters showed, and the ancient doorway appeared to be boarded up. "It's a charming old house," I exclaimed, "though it looks somewhat ruinous, but I see nothing curious about it." The artist was silent for a time, and puffed away furiously at his

pipe. "Well," he continued, "though I know you won't believe me, I may as well finish my story. On returning to my inn I told the landlord where I had been and showed him that sketch, asking him the name of the place. I noticed he looked astonished. 'Why, that's Dash Hall,' he replied; 'it's been pulled down some years ago; you must have copied that from an old photograph. I've got an old one of it in my private room.' You may imagine my surprise at this; I thought the landlord was having some sort of a joke with me. 'Why,' I said to him, 'what do you mean? I've just made that sketch from the very place, and I saw it there half an hour ago.' The landlord glanced at me, I thought, rather funnily, and then he was suddenly called away to the bar, and imagining, as I have said, that he was jesting, though I could see no point in the jest, I thought little more of the matter. Early the next morning I started out in order to make a detailed drawing of the ancient mansion. I soon came to the gateway, and clambering over the wall, looked on the spot where I could have sworn I had seen the rambling old house the night before. I looked in vain, nothing of the kind was anywhere to be seen, only slopes of long grass, bracken, and trees! The house was not; I must have sketched its ghost! That's my story, and it's as true as I am sitting smoking here. I'm not a lunatic, and I'm not a liar. I remember that the day before was close and thundery, so that I might, though I have no recollection of the fact, have laid down on the grass and have dreamt of an old house

being there (having old houses on the brain, if you will), but that would not account for the reality of the sketch, nor for the sketch being a representation of a house that once stood there, and that the landlord recognised as such." Then the artist knocked the ashes out of his pipe and looked inquiringly at me, but I knew not what to say. "You don't believe my story?" he exclaimed, not angrily, but apologetically, I thought, for having troubled me with it. "I knew you would not; nobody I have told it to does, and I can give no reasonable explanation of a most perplexing incident. It's getting late, I must say good-night, but I should like to assure you again that I have not been romancing"—and with that he left me wondering. Whether the story is worth the retelling I feel a little uncertain, being related to me by an utter stranger whose trustworthiness was an unknown quantity; but it was told to me, so have I repeated it.

There are certain curious experiences that come to some people which seem at the time utterly bewildering and beyond any reasonable explanation, and yet such explanation may be forthcoming. I well remember some years ago, when visiting an old manor-house—in which I had most certainly never been before—I was shown one of its ancient chambers, where some notable personage was said to have slept: it was a low panelled room, with a beamed ceiling, mullioned windows, and a quaintly carved stone fireplace; at one end of the room was a large cupboard with a closed door. The moment

I saw the room I felt I had seen it before ; it had a very familiar look. I recognised that fireplace, yet it was of so unique a character, there could hardly be another one so like it. Then a mental vision of the room came to me with the cupboard door open, showing a narrow slit of a window that lighted it. I opened the door to see, and there, certainly enough, was the very window I had pictured in my mind's eye—and expected to find. For the moment I was completely mystified and an uncanny feeling crept over me. How came I to know that room so well, even to the detail revealed by opening the cupboard door? To say the least, it was a strange experience. Just then I felt I could exclaim with Hamlet—

There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy,

when suddenly the mystery was solved. A friend of mine possesses a picture that always much attracts me, entitled "A Visit to the Haunted Chamber," and it was the very chamber I was in that the artist had drawn, showing plainly the quaintly carved stone fireplace, with the cupboard door wide open and revealing the little window beyond. He had faithfully reproduced the room in his picture, altering nothing, content merely to introduce a small party of three being shown it, apparently by an aged housekeeper. The room, though I had never been in it till then, was quite familiar to me because of the picture, but it was some time before the cause of the familiarity was

revealed, to the clearing up of what promised to be an inexplicable mystery!

But I have been digressing. Without, and close by the moat of Huddington Court, stands a small and primitive church, approached only by a solitary and apparently little-used footpath across the meadow; this, we conjectured, was probably the former chapel of the house. It was as we were about to leave the spot that we first observed the little, unpretending fane,—so overshadowed was the humble house of God by the stately home of man, stately even in decay. We regretted to find that the narrow path through the tiny churchyard was paved with old tombstones, their inscriptions mostly worn away. One of the slabs, however, still shows the matrix and stud holes that doubtless held some ancient brass, gone who knows when or whither? The brass may have belonged to one of the early owners of Huddington Court, and have been originally within the church.

By the side of the path, on an upright stone, we noticed the following inscription:—

John Wedgeberrow. December 9th, 1796.

Weep not, my Wife and Eight Children dear,
I am not dead but Sleepeth here,
My head is quiet, my grave you see,
Wait but a while, you'll follow me.

This reminds me of another epitaph with a somewhat similar ending that I chanced upon some years ago, which ran thus:—

Some have children, some have none,
Here lies the mother of twenty-one.
My husband dear and children, see
You all prepare to follow me.

At the foot of which was scratched the feelingless rejoinder :—

To follow you is not our bent
Unless we know the way you went.

Leaving Huddington Court, we motored along a narrow, winding lane that was somewhat rough and stony of surface as though but little used, and it grew rougher as we proceeded; at one point we even found a gate closed across it, by which different signs we feared that the lane would eventually lose itself in fields, or perhaps lead us merely to a lone farm-house. Fortunately it did neither, and after a good deal of uncertain wandering thereon we emerged at the remote little hamlet of Dormston, that looks, as it is, ten miles from anywhere, and it seemed a hundred. Not many road-travellers, I imagine, reach Dormston; never has it heard the screech of the railway whistle, and we wondered whether, before that day, it had ever heard the sound of the motor horn.

Dormston is truly a drowsy, out-of-the-world spot, consisting of a quaint and ancient church with a half-timbered tower, of a picturesque old home, likewise of half-timber, and of somewhat unusual build, and of a cottage or two. Stopping the car under the welcome shade of some wide-branching elms by the lane side, we first made our way to

the church, the black-and-white tower of which pleasantly asserted itself through the surrounding trees. The church is manifestly very ancient, though the roof has been restored and has a trim and fresh look out of harmony with the rest of the structure. The roof is of to-day, the walls and tower and porch of centuries ago. The tower interested us, for church towers of half-timber are somewhat rare; it is of the simplest construction, and perhaps this is why it has lasted so long, yet is it pleasing because of its simplicity; its big oak beams are black with age, though curiously enough its porch of massive oak is bleached by sun and storm almost to white. Within the porch, and by the doorway, we noticed a well-preserved holy-water stoup. As the country around was formerly a great forest, and still is thickly wooded, we conjectured that probably the church was originally wholly of timber, of which the tower and perhaps the porch alone remain, for it was an almost universal rule, transport being difficult, of the early builders to make use of the material nearest to hand; often, indeed, it was a matter of compulsion with them.

On the south wall we espied an old sun-dial, and someone has, at a later date we presumed, carved upon it the interesting information that the building stands in "Lat. $52^{\circ} 14'$," which looks very learned, and to some people may mean much, but did not greatly enlighten us; indeed, had its position been stated differently, we should, in our ignorance, meekly have accepted the information



DORMSTON CHURCH.

as a fact. However, we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had safely reached in our cruise latitude $52^{\circ} 14'$, to commemorate which important event we duly marked the spot with a cross on our map—I mean our chart. There is nothing like being precise in details. I know a certain milestone, on two sides of which are plainly set forth the exact distances, in miles and furlongs, to several towns and places, but besides this, on the top of that milestone, the distance to the sun is carefully given in so many millions of miles, the furlongs merely being omitted. In my new-born passion for accuracy I resented the omission of the furlongs!

From the church we strolled along to the quaint old house already mentioned, which had caught our eye as we drove into the hamlet. On nearer approach this proved to be a charming specimen of ancient architecture. At one time, we guessed, it was a manor-house, though of moderate pretensions, from the fact that close to it stood a large pigeon-cote (designed to be in keeping with the house), showing that the early owner of the estate had the right of pigeonry, a right that belonged, I believe, to no one on a lower social scale than a lord of the manor. Now the old mansion, with a look of long-forgotten prosperity still clinging to it, does duty as a farmstead, and a very delightful farmstead it makes. On the top of the end gable we noticed the date 1662, with the initials I. C. immediately below. The front of the house, with its three half-timber gables in line, its leaden lattice windows gleaming in the sunshine, and creeper-covered

porch, made a very charming picture, but, unfortunately, some trees, that had been allowed to grow wild in the garden, owing to their thick foliage effectually prevented us from securing a photograph of this the best point of view, so we had to be contented with taking one of the end of the building, which, though it certainly gives some impression of the place, fails to convey an adequate idea of its quaintness and its pleasing proportions.

There was one unique feature about the building that we had never noticed in any old house before, and this was that below the top gables and above each story is a slightly projecting rooflet (if I may be allowed to coin a word to help my description) of tiles supported by a series of oak brackets. Manifestly the purpose of this arrangement is, in the absence of rain-water gutters or pipes, to throw the water off the building as much as possible, and in his search after utility the ancient architect unconsciously added to the picturesqueness of his structure by so pleasantly breaking the straight lines of the walls. In the same way gargoyles were devised purely for the purpose of throwing the water from the roof clear of the walls below, and with no other thought than that; but the medieval craftsman seized the opportunity of making them decorative. His creed was to ornament needful construction, and therewith to be content. He knew better than to fret the surface of his buildings, as we too often do to-day, with meaningless carvings put on haphazard merely with the idea of being ornamental—adornments that do not adorn!



THE MOAT HOUSE, DORMSTON.

We found the farmer in his garden sunning himself whilst glancing at his growing fruits and vegetables. After the usual courtesy of bidding him good-day, followed naturally by a chat about the crops and the never-failing topic of the weather, we ventured to remark that he was a lucky man to live in such a picturesque old house. "Well," he responded, "it's certainly old enough, and maybe it's picturesque, but I ain't much gone on the picturesque. I daresay it be a pretty enough house to look at, but, you see, I don't sit in the garden and look at it; I lives in it, and this I do say, it be very inconvenient inside. Yes, you be very welcome to photograph it, but I don't see much in the old place"; and so he chatted on. We were in hopes that perhaps he would invite us within to inspect the inconvenient arrangements, for the exterior of the house gave promise of an interesting interior, even at the cost of convenience, but some one suddenly appeared at the door and shouted, "Dinner be ready." "I be ready for it too," exclaimed the farmer, and forthwith disappeared, and we saw no more of him. Scott once said he never travelled in a stagecoach but that he found much entertainment in the talks he had with the chance companions of his journey; and the traveller of to-day in the modern motor car may find the same in chatting with strangers on the way.

Though there are few to see or admire that picture of an old home at Dormston—for Dormston is well away from the beaten track of tourist or other travel—still I trust it will stand there unhurt

long years to come, and that it may escape the indignity of being purchased for removal elsewhere by some enterprising speculator in old houses! I am induced to make this perhaps somewhat puzzling remark, it having come to my recent knowledge that a certain firm of builders have bought a very beautiful old half-timbered country house, and have pulled it down—very carefully though, be it noted, every timber and every stone being numbered—in view of re-erecting it elsewhere, with the glamour of age still upon it, for any purchaser “who desires to avail himself of so rare an opportunity.” And this is not a solitary case of the kind. Moreover, the house was by no means a small one, judging by the photograph I saw of it, and of its picturesqueness there could be no two opinions. So it would seem that nowadays new men may purchase not only old ancestral acres, but also old ancestral homes to place upon them should the estate not be provided with one! Let us hope that this interesting specimen of old English architecture will not find its way to America. Verily, it would be a novel idea for Americans to buy old historic homes here and to transport them across the wide Atlantic! “There would,” I learn, “be no great difficulty in shipping all this fine old oak, and setting the house up again in the United States, provided that workmen were sent over the Atlantic who knew how to piece it together. The American house-builder would scarcely know how to set about it.”

There appears to be a special art in the taking down of old houses for the purpose of re-edifying

them as they originally were, for big cranes have to be erected above a building so treated. "Its massive beams, joists, and ceilings have to be separated and gently lowered to the ground. The saw, the axe, or the pick are never used. The old oak beams are fastened together with long oak pins. There is no method of withdrawing the pins except by drilling. With the help of the auger they are bored away. Not till then will the timbers come apart. Once the pins are disposed of, the beams come away like pieces of steel, with edges as keen and true as that metal. . . . Ordinary hard wood would be twisted and warped by the enormous weight resting upon it, but old English oak resists pressure for hundreds of years."

The only instance in which I have actually seen an ancient building that has been removed from one spot and re-erected on another is at Leominster. In order to make more room in the roadway the authorities of that town, some years ago, sold their fine old half-timber market-hall. This was fortunately purchased by a local gentleman, carefully pulled down and very successfully rebuilt on another site, —so successfully, indeed, that a stranger viewing it and not knowing its story would never dream but that it had always stood where it now is. Full particulars of this unusual performance I have given in a former work, viz. *Through Ten English Counties*.

CHAPTER XVIII

An old gate-house—The Nunnery, Salford Priors—A quaint interior—Ghostly chambers—A priest's hiding-place—"The prettiest village in all England"—Belated—The wind on the Cotswolds—Over the hills—Miles from anywhere—The glamour of speed—A delightful resting spot—At Nature's wayside hostelry.

LEAVING Dormston we drove along shady country lanes that led us, from time to time, to wide and dusty highways, but we deserted the latter on every opportunity for the more agreeable byways. As usual our chief concern was to select a road that promised pleasant wandering. We troubled nothing about direction or destination; we did not set out "to go to this or t'other place." Chance took us a south-easterly course, and that served as well as any.

After traversing some miles of lonely but beautiful country, we found ourselves in the village of Salford Priors, and as it failed to attract us we proceeded on our way. "We've had a feast of interesting old buildings of late," I exclaimed; "by the law of average we must not expect to come upon any more to-day." But "it is never safe to prophesy unless you know," for we had not journeyed far from

Salford Priors when, by the side of the road, we beheld a quaint and ivy-grown gate-house, and through its wide arch we caught a glimpse beyond of an ancient, time-toned mansion. Both gate-house and grey-gabled home would have arrested a traveller's attention anywhere for their combined picturesqueness and effective grouping. Fortune, indeed, favoured us in having again so quickly presented to our delighted vision another old-world romance in stone and timber.

Pulling up the car, we first took a photograph of the old gate-house, the reproduction of which, given herewith, will serve to reveal better than any written description what a charming, though unpretending, bit of architecture this is, and what a picture it makes with the ivy clinging lovingly to it—its great square sun-dial on its central gable, its primitive outside stairway, and its substantial oak gates, possibly coeval with the building.

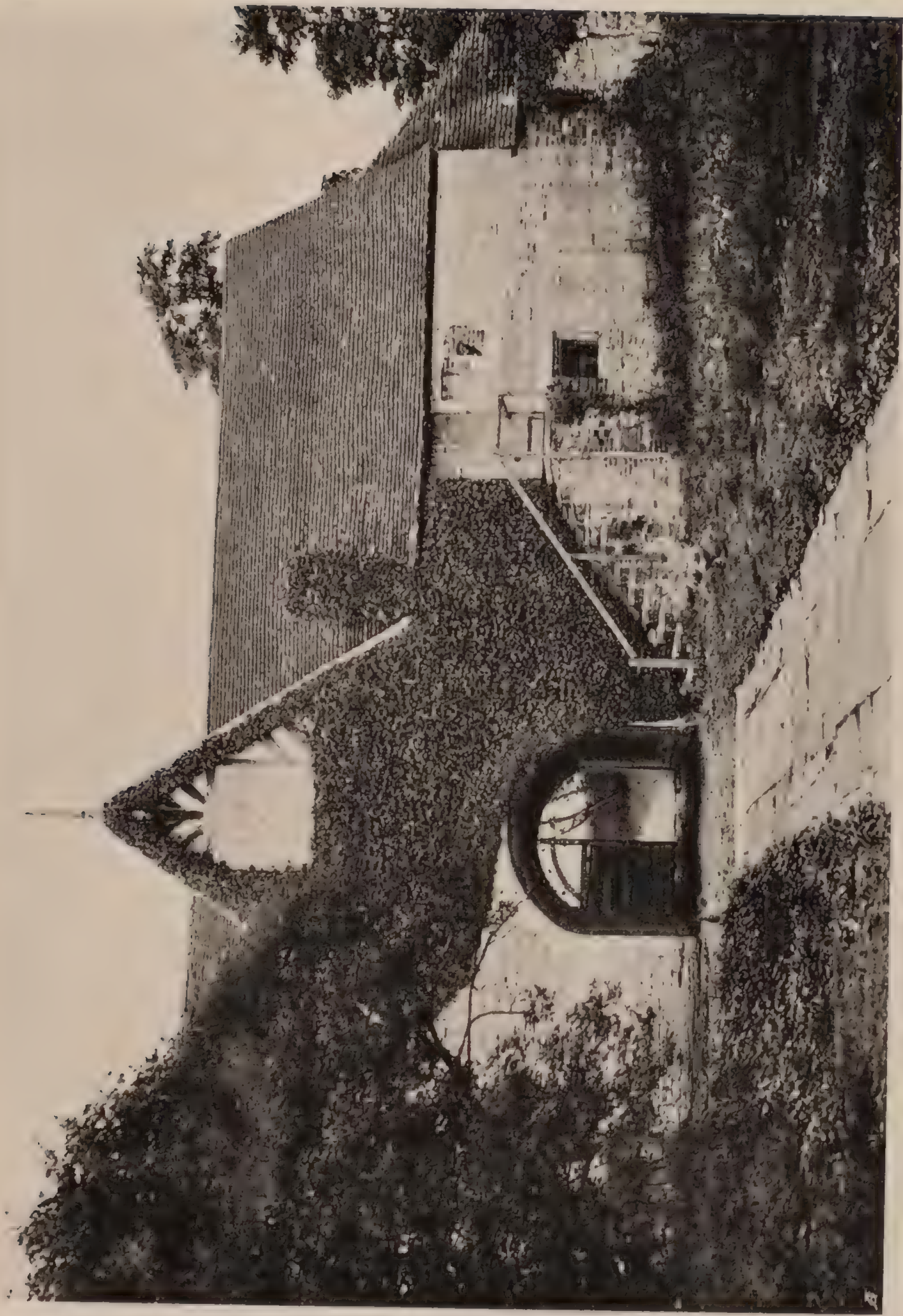
Whilst we were taking the photograph we noticed a woman watching us curiously from the open doorway of the great house beyond, and we approached her with a view of discovering if it were possible to see over the place. "Well," she responded, "if you'd give me a shilling for my time and trouble I'll show you over." We gladly closed the bargain. We would have given a good deal more to attain our object; yet somehow we did not quite like the commercial spirit of the transaction, there was no romance about that! But, after all, the great thing was to see over the house, and this we did. As we were chatting with the old body—what office she

filled "in this needful world" I could not say; I imagine, however, she was a caretaker—as we were chatting together we noticed, carved in stone over the entrance, the following inscription:—

MODERATA DVRANT, 1662.

Then placing ourselves under her charge, we proceeded to inspect the interior of the ancient building. First we were shown into a spacious hall, before entering which we noticed a carved gilt and coloured coat-of-arms above the doorway. To whom this belonged, however, our guide expressed ignorance; anyhow it looked picturesquely important. "The pride of heraldry" is certainly not one that "apes humility," still if a man possesses of right a coat-of-arms, perhaps the best use he can make of it, if he uses it at all, is to decorate his house therewith; but, like the pictures of my childhood, I prefer such "gilt and coloured." A coat-of-arms displayed thus is an excuse for a bit of brilliant colouring, and so is pleasing in a way if one can get over the ostentation of the thing; and after all that does not concern the observer.

The hall was bare of any kind of furniture, and had a desolate look. Not even was there a forgotten helmet, rusting away, hung on the walls; its only decorations were some dusty cobwebs, and even the cobwebs looked ancient. At one end of the apartment was a great open fireplace, whereon, in past days, doubtless, huge logs blazed upon its ample hearth and sent forth a ruddy glow around. But at the time of our visit all was dull, dusky, and



GATE-HOUSE: THE NUNNERY, SALFORD PRIORS.

cheerless, almost to impressiveness, excepting that on the floor, through the stained glass and much-mullioned window, the sunshine shed patches of rich colouring from the emblazoned shields let in the leaded panes above, as though a page of some old missal had been transported there. Still, in spite of these, the hall struck a note of gloominess, as ancient chambers in deserted houses do—houses wherein men have been born, have feasted and made merry, and have died. The body is there, but the spirit has fled!

“The house is uninhabited?” we queried. “Well,” responded our guide, “there are two bedrooms and a sitting-room upstairs furnished with old things, and sometimes they are occupied for a few days in the shooting season, otherwise the place is bare and forsaken enough. It’s dreary work living in it, but one gets used to the life. It were once a nunnery, and it is still called the Nunnery; but the poor, harmless nuns were driven out a long while ago. Only their chapel remains, which I will show you presently, and Catholic worship is still carried out there daily. I am a Catholic, and I do feel it were a shame to drive the poor nuns out. People bain’t so religious as they were in past times.” We said we were sorry to hear that, and endeavoured to discover from her more of the past history of the place, but failed. She told us that she knew no more. Not a very satisfactory guide, still better than one of the mendacious tribe who impose invented stories upon the credulous, and sometimes make it difficult to winnow fact from fable.

As we ascended the oak staircase to the upper chambers we noted that the steps were all of solid blocks of wood, and as firm to the tread as the day they were put up. The old-time craftsman never stinted material; out of the abundance he employed in the building of this house, the modern speculative builder, I have small doubt, would easily make two of equal size, and then have something over. I was talking to a speculative builder of average honesty the other day, who was erecting "a desirable villa" for sale, and very desirable he declared it to be; "and pretty too, with its half-timbered front, just like them old country houses people rave about so." But the beams, I noticed, were all of soft, cheap deal stained over to look like oak if not too critically examined, and I wondered how long the wood would stand, exposed to the English climate. I even ventured to express my thoughts to the builder. "Bless my heart!" exclaimed he, "I'll wager the wood will last for fifty or sixty years, if kept well painted—perhaps longer." I felt that the builder gave himself away, though he did not see it, for he further exclaimed, "You surely don't expect a house to last for ever!" But this was hardly for a lifetime! The old craftsman built as well as he knew how; the modern speculative builder too often builds as badly as he dare. Yet the speculative builder is not wholly to blame. The public demand a good-looking house in this or that style which fashion mostly favours at the moment, with plenty of accommodation and "all the latest sanitary improvements," but is unwilling, or unable,

to pay the price of sound construction ; so people get their ready-made homes, cheap and showy, and grumble ever afterwards at the inevitable and never-ending repair bills. Another speculative builder informed me that, as an experiment, he built six houses "thoroughly well from roof to basement," trusting that the public might appreciate and pay for good honest work. At the same time he built six others of "the usual selling type"; but, he declared to me, "I lost as much on the extra well-built houses as eat up all my profits on the other six."

In a dark corner upstairs, hidden away in the centre of the Nunnery, our guide pointed out to us an ancient clock. "That has stood there for ages"—and still was going with a lazy and measured tick, tick, tick, as though time went slower there than elsewhere; but we saw no face or hands, only the ponderous works. The clock, we learnt, had neither face nor hands. "It only strikes the hours on the bell in the turret on the roof. The nuns only needed to know the hours." Happy nuns to be able to treat time thus leisurely!

Next we were conducted to the nuns' dormitory, a long, many-windowed chamber, a gallery rather than a room; a spacious but cheerless apartment in itself, though there were delightful peeps through the windows of the wicked outer world—peeps of green fields brightened by the gleam of water, and of waving woods backed by gently sloping hills beyond. A world that looked very fair to us that sunshiny day, and with no suggestion of "the trail

of the serpent" about it. Possibly the nuns, harboured there safe from the stress and storms of life, deemed it a very sinful world, though, speaking as an ordinary mortal, I find it a fairly satisfactory one to live in,—not perfect, but pleasant enough. However, saints are somewhat exacting. I am afraid I am rather in sympathy with the old woman who was ill in bed, and when an officious curate came to her and solemnly said, "My good woman, I've come to talk to you about a better world," testily replied, "Oh! if that's all, you needn't have bothered yourself. Old England's good enough for me!"

Next we were conducted along some dark and deserted corridors, wherein our footsteps re-echoed strangely loud, as though some ghostly visitor was treading close behind. Then at the end of the corridor a cupboard was pointed out to us let into the thickness of the wall. It looked quite an ordinary cupboard with three shelves at the back, and we could not understand why we had been brought there to see it, and said so. But "things are not always what they seem!" The old body smiled, and made reply, "That's no ordinary cupboard. See here!"—and thereupon she pushed the back of it, shelves and all, inwards, and revealed a dismal unlighted space below, hollowed out of the solid masonry. "That be a hiding-hole," she explained. "The back of the cupboard works on hinges above, so that any one could easily push it aside and get into the hole. And there is a bolt at the bottom, so that whoever was hidden there could

fix the whole thing up tight again ; then some odd bits of china were placed on the shelves, which were left dusty on purpose, so that no one would suspect anything. You can get inside and try it, if you like." But we felt no desire to do so ; the very look of the darksome, cobwebby hole satisfied us. It is a most ingeniously contrived hiding-place, albeit dark, cramped, and uncomfortable, but, I should imagine, fairly safe from discovery, and that, after all, was the chief virtue of one. In those adventurous days no house of importance was considered complete without a hiding-hole ; it was, indeed, deemed a necessity. Some houses were provided with more than one. Nor were they always easy to be discovered by ordinary means of search, so cunningly were they devised. A certain astute Cromwellian officer, however, hit upon a simple and effective plan of securing fugitives hidden away in them with little trouble or delay. On arriving with his men at a suspected house, he bluntly declared that he was aware that a fugitive, or fugitives, was hidden there, and demanded him, or them, to be delivered up forthwith. He lost no time in listening to vain assurances that he was mistaken, merely declaring that he had surrounded the house with his men, and that he could not wait to make a detailed search, so unless the fugitives were promptly delivered up he would burn the house down "and force the rats to come out." It was a very simple plan, brutal but effectual.

Next we were shown two bed-chambers with panelled walls and finely carved mantel-pieces ; one

had also a richly ornamented frieze. The rooms were furnished with old-fashioned furniture, including, of course, four-poster bedsteads with faded hangings. Both chambers had a genuinely haunted look, though strangely enough no ghost was known to have favoured them with its presence—a manifest case of a neglected opportunity, for they were chambers that any respectable ghost might be proud to be associated with. I have slept in a haunted room, the reputation of which was well established; yet I slept therein soundly and undisturbed. But then the room had modern furniture, though of itself it was ancient enough. But I do not think that I could have slept so unconcernedly in either of those musty, panelled rooms at the Nunnery; for, after all is said, one's surroundings do influence the mind, and there is an uncomfortable sort of feeling in spending the lonely watches of the night in an ancient panelled chamber, suggestive of secret passages behind the panelling, so that it may be entered at any time, though the door be fast closed and bolted. The mullioned windows of these chambers were adorned by sundry coats-of-arms gorgeously emblazoned in stained glass by the craftsman of centuries ago; and we were impressed by the fact that though everything else about was faded and dim, the colours burnt into the fragile glass were as bright and as fresh as though they were the production of yesterday. There now only remained the chapel for us to inspect, the one cheerful apartment in the building, about which there hung the faint scent of incense. After this



THE NUNNERY, SALFORD PRIORS.

we took our departure into the modern outer world, for within the Nunnery we had dwelt in an atmosphere of the past.

Very fresh and green looked the country, and brightly blue the sky, after the time-dimmed interior of that ancient mansion. I am afraid I should make but a poor monk, for my soul delights in the joy and the freedom of the wide, open world, and could not long endure the bondage of stone walls. The glamour of a place is gone when you have to live in it under compulsion. Remounting the car we once more proceeded on our pleasant pilgrimage, and quickly came to the pretty little village of Harvington, snugly nestled amongst woods, and very charming it looked with its half-timbered cottages and little gardens gay with old-fashioned flowers, as though existing for the sake of the landscape painter. And where in other lands will you find such picturesque villages and hamlets as you may still meet with in Old England?

Beyond Harvington we struck upon an undulating country of spacious fields and sheltering woods. And so we sped merrily along, now in grateful shade, and now in the open golden sunshine, till we arrived by chance at Fladbury, a little village on the Avon, with a large old mill "beside the rushing water." Mill and river made a pleasant enough picture, but nothing to rave about. Then in a short time we came upon a lovely stretch of the river, where it leisurely circled past low wooded hills on one hand, and lush, level meadows on the other. There we crossed the stream on a modern iron

bridge, very neat and hard of outline, that added nothing to the beauty of the scene. An old stone bridge with its rough buttresses, its grey parapets, and rounded arches (round, but not precisely so), would have been in keeping with the spot, and have made it a dream of pleasantness. But the iron structure was an eyesore, merely a thing of convenience, good enough for a manufacturing town where men do not expect beauty, and good nowhere else.

Thence we drove into the tiny hamlet of Cropthorne, that with its tidy, thatched, and whitewashed cottages might have been bodily transported from Devonshire.

Whilst we were stopping there to take a photograph, an old inhabitant came up to us and exclaimed with manifest pride, "You don't often come to such a pretty place as this; they do say as how it be the prettiest spot in all England." It was pleasant to find a countryman so enthusiastic about the charms of the village he lived in, for, as a rule, rural folk have small care for beauty. But that old inhabitant ruined the romance of his remark by adding, "Yes, it be the prettiest village in all England, but I would rather live in London, that I would; there's lots going on there; it's main dull living here without hardly ever a stranger to talk to or to pass the time of day with. I get a bit tired a-seeing the same folk's faces day after day, and knowing just what they are going to say before they says it." I fancy it is the monotony and dulness of village life that drives the country dweller into the

towns; the cry of "Back to the land" will remain nothing more than a vain cry until we can do something to really brighten country existence to the average man who gets his living from the soil. Truly, I have known city-bred people, who have experienced it, delighted with the simple life in a country cottage for a whole month in the summer, and heartily tired of it in two—when the novelty had lost its charm. But to live in the country is no novelty for the country-bred man!

After Cropthorne we got into a maze of rural lanes that, like those of Devonshire, had many turnings, but seemed to have no ending; meanwhile the shadows were lengthening; the scenery was pleasant enough, but just then, with evening fast approaching, we felt that "the finest scenery is improved with a good hotel in the foreground"; moreover, we were famishingly hungry, and our luncheon-basket was empty! "Is it not about time for our inn to make its appearance?" exclaimed my wife a little anxiously I thought. But no inn was in sight, only green fields, woods, and a stray farmhouse or two. Thereafter we motored moodily on for a time, but our usual good fortune still favoured us; we had not proceeded far before we suddenly came upon an ancient and many-gabled hostelry hidden away under the lee of the Cotswolds, whereat we received a hearty welcome, such as would have rejoiced the heart of Shenstone, and found, besides comfortable accommodation, excellent fare, and even interesting fellow-guests gathered there by happy chance—what more could the most

exacting wayfarer desire? So far every day had had a pleasant ending, for every night we had found a home away from home. "No human contrivance has produced so much happiness as a good tavern," wrote Dr. Johnson, whom it is the privilege of all Englishmen to quote.

We awoke next morning to a day of brilliant sunshine, a day that would have done credit to Italy. Down in the valley, sheltered by the hills, we found the heat oppressive, a fact that determined us to get on to the top of the open Cotswolds that rose boldly above, for there, if anywhere in England, a cool breeze may be found even in the hottest weather. As a local saying has it—

The wind always blows
Cold on the Cotswolds,

And it blows for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year.

With such a record one would imagine that it should be a land of windmills, but, strangely enough, not one is to be found there. Probably this is due to the circumstance that in the old days the Cotswolds were given up almost wholly to sheep-farming and the production of wool, so that there was no corn for a mill to grind.

A long stiff climb brought us to the summit of the windy wolds, and though not a leaf was stirring in the valley below, on the hills above we were refreshed by a bracing, though balmy, breeze. A glorious, open, wind-swept land was before and around us, a majestic sweep of curving uplands, over which the vision ranged unrestrained, to where

on the high horizon the earth seemed to melt into the sky. On the top of the bare bleak Cotswolds, delightfully bleak on a hot summer day, one may drive for miles and meet not a soul, for the houses and villages mostly seek the shelter of the valleys, where too needful water may be found. But such loneliness has its charms: it is good, at times, to be alone with the bare earth and open sky to learn the bliss of solitude. Before us stretched the deserted road; we could trace it for miles and miles, a long line of grey in a vastness of green space that faded into blue, rising and falling with the rise and fall of the hills. Then the spirit of speed took possession of us, the fascination and the frenzy of speed for speed's sake; the rush through the air, mocking the bird in its flight—we even raced a bird that flew alongside, and we won. We had escaped from the fetters that bind man to earth; we were intoxicated with a new-born sense of splendid freedom; without exertion or effort we lightly skimmed the ground; we rode on the wind as it were! The motor car, that marvel of iron and steel, that wonderful triumph of mind over matter, with the beat of its pistons and the whirl of its gears, has conquered the ancient burden of distance, has levelled the hills, and won the horizon! We were rushing into infinity; “distances, changes, surprises” greeted us in rapid succession as we sped along over the wild, sweeping wolds, and the wind that smote us now was mostly that of our own making. Speed is a glorious thing when you can indulge in it without the risk of hurt or annoyance

to a living soul ; it is a tonic for mind and body, it braces the nerves, sets the blood a-tingling through one's veins, and sweeps the gathered cobwebs from the brain !

But, in spite of the joy of it, speed was our servant, not our master—a thing, like wine, to be indulged in at times, but not to become drunk with ! An occasional stimulant only. There is an old proverb that runs, “ It's the opportunity that makes the sinner,” and I must confess that it was the tempting opportunity of an extended stretch of deserted road, with no human being, nor dog, nor fowl, nor cat, nor house for leagues in sight, that caused us to do a bit of harmless scorching and “ to show the mettle ” of our car.

It was a bracing, inspiriting drive, a drive to be remembered. Around us in mighty curves were a sea of hills rising bare to the sky, and dipping down to the sheltered valleys ; hills beyond hills unfolded themselves, and nothing else but hills, green hills growing into grey and fading into blue. Our road and the wide fields were bounded by low walls of loose and rugged stone, innocent of mortar or any other binding material, yet strong and enduring, walls which faithfully followed the roll of the land ; like the weathered rocks of the mountains these walls were all time-toned and mellowed to a hue that harmonised with the prospect, so its breadth was undisturbed. It was a land without movement and without sound, except for the golden gleams of sunshine and grey cloud shadows that raked the sides of the hills, blown from one eternity to

another, and for the wail of the wind through the creviced walls, and the surge of it over the rough grassy slopes.

Keen and stimulating is the breeze on the Cotswolds : it greets you with a manly embrace, it hugs you with no gentleness or warmth ; it is like strong wine, but without the hurt of it ; it intoxicates harmlessly, beneficently ; it makes you glad to be alive ! Like Kingsley's " Jovial wind " it braces " brain and sinew," and, if doctors know their trade, it gives " iron to the blood and phosphates to the body." But the Cotswolds are a summer land ; in the winter-time even the hardiest soul could find but little joy in traversing them ; yet on a sultry autumn noon these wind-swept, open uplands are a pure delight. Bright with the unshadowed light of the wide overarching sky is the air of them, and beautiful is the colouring of their bare but not barren hills. There, on the hottest day of the year, you may rejoice and bask in the full sunshine, for no oppressive heat comes with it, only a sense of warmth that is welcome — a warmth always pleasantly tempered with a refreshing breeze that is beyond suspicion pure !

But the Cotswold country—a region of repose and peacefulness—is not one to be rushed through as we rushed through it that day ; we had, however, the excuse of having, on a previous journey, leisurely explored many of its old-world nooks and corners, and few districts there are that better repay exploring. Hidden away amongst its valleys are many quaint and ancient villages that have suffered

little or no change for centuries, and where life seems always dreamy; villages frequently favoured in the possession of fine churches of considerable interest and architectural merit; stately fanes, though only village ones, that owe their existence and embellishments to the combined piety and prosperity of bygone generations of the flock-masters and the cloth merchants of the locality.

You have merely to scratch the soil of the Cotswolds to come upon excellent building stone, soft, easily worked, and yellowish of hue when first quarried, but quickly hardening and toning to a delightful silvery-grey on exposure to the weather. An ideal building material, judging from the century-old Cotswold homes that have stood the brunt of countless winter storms and frosts with small signs of the ravaging hand of Time. Nearly all the ancient Cotswold buildings, be they churches, manor-houses, farmsteads, inns, or simply cottages, are delightfully picturesque, and they owe their picturesqueness, not to age alone, but to the artistic feeling of the craftsmen who raised them, a feeling that found expression in all they did. The architecture of the Cotswolds is a type distinct: it happily combines simplicity, homeliness (even in a stately mansion), and perfect proportion, which of itself is a delight to the trained eye, with the charm of bold and effective outline of big gables, high-pitched roofs, and clustering chimney-stacks that pleasantly break the skyline—above all it is strong, enduring, and tempest proof. Manifestly the builders of the period expected their houses to be

beautiful to look upon as well as solidly constructed and desirable to live in, and they achieved all these objects. Rarely, elsewhere, will you find architecture combining such simplicity in the mass with such grace, restrained yet not wholly wanting in decorative detail, nor overburdened with it. The secret of its charm lies in the inherent good taste of the ancient craftsman, who, moreover, loved his work, great or small, and did all things as well as he knew how for the pride of it; so you will discover the old-time Cotswold cottage to be as carefully built and thought out, as beautiful with its stone porch, its mullioned windows, shapely chimneys, and grey slab roofs, as dignified in its way as the stately manor-house—it is simply smaller, not less worthy of admiration.

As we drove on, glorying the while in the fresh and fragrant air, we began in time gradually to descend from our elevated position; still the country remained open, wild, and bare; but at one spot, where the land dipped down, we came to a lonely little pine-wood, in the shade of which we pulled up and unpacked our luncheon basket, for the keen Cotswold air had made us ravenously hungry, and no hungry man can properly enjoy himself. There at Nature's wayside hostelry we found ample accommodation, with a stretch of dry and smooth sward to spread our rugs upon, and a grey, sloping, old stone wall to recline against. For company we had the cheerful twittering of birds, the liquid gurgling of a tiny stream, and "Wind, that grand old harper" (for our especial benefit, as there was no one else to

hear), struck his harp of pillared pines beside us, and wild and weird were the airs he played.

The wind before it wooes the harp
Is but the wild and timeless air,
But as it passes through the trees
Changes to music, sweet and rare.

Roofed with the blue of heaven above, walled by the fragrant wood of pine, carpeted by the thymy grass, did ever tired wayfarer have a more delightful chamber to rest in ?

CHAPTER XIX

Far from civilisation—A cheerful solitude—The magnetism of the lane—Bampton—A house with a history—Travellers' luck—A remote spot—An anglers'- and artists'-haunted hostelry—East Hagbourne—An old dame's opinions—The courtesy of country folk—Comicalities in carving—The cult of spelling—At an old coaching inn.

WE lazed for long in the shelter of the scented pine-wood, lulled almost to sleep by the musical murmuring of the stream and the world-ancient, soothing airs that the wind played for us on his mighty harp of pines—airs that were old when the world was young, and that one never wearies of listening to. We were alone with Nature. The only signs of civilisation around was the forsaken road, stretching away into infinity of blue, and the bit of rugged wall, moss-grown, old, and grey, and we rejoiced in our peaceful seclusion. Had we been on another planet we could not have been more undisturbed!

Beyond the edge of the sounding pine wood we caught a glimpse of the distant undulating hills, rising ridge upon ridge, all drinking in the sunshine. The spot attracted us because of its tranquillity and loneliness; but Nature's loneliness is cheerful and

companionable (though the terms may sound a contradiction), the very antithesis of the crowded loneliness of towns. And did not Matthew Arnold speak of "the cheerful solitude of the fells"?

Still one can have enough of rest, and to prolong it beyond a point breeds restlessness; indeed, there comes a time, even to the weary pilgrim, when movement itself is a reposeful thing. So we fared forth once more into the open sunlit country. We had not gone far before we came to a solitary leaning signpost with one weather-beaten arm pointing down a rough and rather narrow road, and briefly inscribed, "To Bampton." What induced us to take that turning I cannot say, unless it were that to Bampton we had never been; but anyway, by a sudden impulse we took it. Thoreau remarks: "What is it makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will go? I believe there is a subtle magnetism in Nature which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright . . . and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea." Truly, we had no distinct direction in our mind; indeed, we seldom had. It was the sight of that signpost that decided the matter for us; there it stood, boldly pointing out a way, as though purposely inviting us to explore it. Moreover, byroads always have a special attraction, for they lead one right into the heart of the real country. The highways generally end in large towns; the byroad and the lane serve the village, and take one off the beaten track.

The road proved rough and narrow, sufficient for the needs of the country-side, but not suggestive of leading to any place of importance, though to say this may appear to cast a slur on Bampton, and so the better we were pleased, as it gave us a fuller sense of exploring. Around stretched a wide, rolling, healthy-looking land given over to quiet farming, for there appeared to be an entire absence of parks or stately homes therein, and the dwellings we saw (grey and stone-built like those of the North Country) were either farm-houses or cottages, and all seemed ancient, and none to be later than the seventeenth century. So driving on through this pleasant, uneventful country we reached Bampton, which at first we took for a large village, so small a town is it, but on inquiring the name of the place we were informed that it was Bampton-in-the-Bush. The inhabitants, with plenty of spare time on their hands, give the place the dignity of its full title, and give it leisurely, just as some people still say Henley-on-Thames instead of the shorter and sufficient Henley, though the general tendency of the age is to shorten names, as Cister for Cirencester, Idsley for Iddesleigh, and so forth. Why Bampton-in-the-Bush I cannot say, unless it were originally surrounded by woods at one time; but this is mere unprofitable guessing.

Bampton proved to be a drowsy, old-fashioned, one-streeted little town of old and time-mellowed houses, and there is little else to be said of it. Yet it has a pleasant look, because it is clean, neat, and primitive, and does not pretend to be more than

that ; it does not sigh for the things that are modern and often ugly. The progressive influences of to-day avoid Bampton, and Bampton avoids them. I find on referring to my *Paterson's Roads*, the *Bradshaw* of our forefathers, Bampton thus described : "A town of some traffic and eminence before the Conquest, but it now wears a tranquil appearance." But how the writer of *Paterson* came to be so well informed about the importance of the town in the far-off pre-Conquest days I cannot say ; anyhow, in the coaching age it does not appear to have been more flourishing than now. It seems to be one of those somewhat rare English towns that neither grow nor diminish nor suffer much change as the centuries pass by. You may often estimate the importance of a town by the roads that lead to it, and the road that took us to Bampton was narrow, rough, and indirect.

At the end of the town the road forked in two, and we selected the one branching to the left, for the simple reason that a boy told us "It goes nowhere in particular," and that indefinite destination, which we could not well miss, suited well our roving propensities. Now followed a stretch of corn-growing country, level, and flushed with cheerful sunshine, bright and open, though not specially attractive, and we discovered nothing to arrest our attention till we found ourselves in a remote little village of scattered cottages. The village was agreeable enough without any claim to be pretty, and we should have passed through it unconcernedly had we not espied, over some fields

near by, the great gables, bent roof, and big stone chimney-stacks of a large and ancient mansion, worn and age-dimmed. We thereupon asked the name of the place from an old woman sunning herself in her garden (these old rural dames seem to find plenty of time to do nothing), and she informed us that it was called Cote House, and that the name of the village was Cote also ; but beyond the evident fact that the house was very old, that it was now a farm-house, and the unsought-for information that farming was not what it used to be, "leastways in this part of the country," we could extract no further particulars from her. Then she changed the subject, and began a depressing account of her bodily ailments, to which we listened with what patience we could command, when, without a pause for breath, she started upon a long family history ; and as she appeared to be settling down for a good hour's gossip, we quietly slipped away right in the midst of it, when she shouted after us, " I bain't a-finished yet," but we did not stop the car. Possibly she thought it had run away with us against our will !

Keeping the ancient house in view, we took a road that led us directly to it and there came to an end. Before us stood a veritable romance in stone, a stately though decayed home of the Jacobean days, apparently but little altered since first built those many years ago. It was well retired from the road by a large and tranquil garden, a trifle neglected, perhaps, but none the less pleasant to look upon—a garden enclosed by a high stone wall all lichen-stained and moss-grown at the top, but we

caught a peep of it through a beautifully designed iron gate that stood between two tall pillared posts. Wrought in amongst the ornamental ironwork at the top of the gate were a number of letters, but what the motto or legend was they were intended to convey we could not make out, for the majority of the letters had rusted away, and the few, wide apart, that were left failed to convey any meaning, which was provoking, as they raised our curiosity. A little farther on we discovered a drive up to the house, and we boldly ventured to knock at the door and beg permission to photograph the place, which permission was readily and very kindly granted.

Whilst we were taking the photographs the occupier of the house and his wife appeared upon the scene. This was a bit of good fortune, yet one we had half hoped for, as it afforded us the opportunity of getting into a friendly chat with them, and opened out the possibility—provided we made a favourable impression, which we tried our best to do—of obtaining the further permission to view, or, better still, of being spontaneously invited to inspect the interior of the old home. To me it seems that to travel by road is to find friends everywhere, a remark that I believe I have made before, but desire here to emphasise; not only were we invited to see the interior, but—strangers though we were—were even asked to take some refreshment. What a friendly corner of the world this England of ours is! It is, in truth, a pleasant land to travel in to him who has “learnt to live pleasant.” Somehow John Bull has the character of being very reserved and



COTE: A HOUSE WITH A HISTORY.

blunt in manner with strangers; we have never found him in the least so; if any one has a contrary experience I think he must be himself to blame, and it should be borne in mind that always a traveller makes or mars his welcome. "Manners makyth man" was the motto of old William of Wykeham, manners also make the traveller.

The old house looked as though it should have a story, or some legend connected with it—or even perhaps a ghost. We ventured to remark this to the tenant. Our intuition was not at fault—the house had a history, though it was ghostless, and this is what we gleaned of its past. It was built early in the reign of James I. by one Thomas Horde, who came of an ancient Shropshire family, and who purchased the estate of Cote, and built himself there a lordly home. Though he did not strictly fortify this, yet he thought well to surround it by a wide and deep moat, a portion of which still remains. Even at that period, to a home of any importance a defensive moat was considered a necessity, or at least a desirable thing to have. The situation of the house is low, as was the prevailing custom of the time, not, I imagine, to obtain shelter, as some authorities have strangely suggested—our ancestors were surely far too hardy a race to give thought to such a matter—but in order, it seems more probable to me, to ensure a supply of water for the moat, and also to prevent the moat being drained.

There is one uncommon feature about Cote, considering that it was in no way a stronghold, and that is a tall watch-tower that commands a wide

and uninterrupted view over the level country around, so that the inhabitants could have ample warning of the approach of any attacking force, at least as long as the daylight lasted. During the troublous times of the struggle between Charles I. and the Parliament, at that special period when the king had his headquarters at Oxford, less than ten miles away, this peaceful district was the scene of much strenuous fighting, and naturally Cote did not long escape the attentions of both parties. The Hordes, it appears, sided with the Parliament, and closed their gates against the king, successfully resisting all attempts to capture their house; for which action, after the Restoration, the Hordes were compelled, in order to retain their estate, to pay a perpetual fine of £25 a year to Oxford Gaol, which fine is still duly demanded and paid by the present owner of the property. There is a local tradition that the main gate has been kept locked and never once been opened since it was closed against the Stuart king, but like many another old-crusted and pretty tradition we learnt that it had no foundation of fact; though rusty and creaking complainingly on its hinges when moved, the historic gate was kindly—with some exertion—opened for us, and we passed freely through where a king was refused admission.

The interior of the house is of considerable interest; there we found the usual large hall with dais and open fireplace, and upon the wide hearth stood the ancient andirons, having great blocks of wood between them, just as in the olden days, the

front door opening directly upon the hall. Cromwell slept one night at Cote—it may have been more than one, but one he slept for certain—and we were taken up a gloomy, echoing staircase of the customary Elizabethan pattern with round balls on the uprights, to view the chamber he occupied. This is situated in a wing of the house not now used, and so going to slow but sure decay, the fate of all uncared-for things. The chamber is truly in a sorry plight, for the flooring of it is rotten and gave way beneath our tread ; it was not even safe to walk over ; in places there were gaping holes through which the supporting rafters showed. This dismal and deserted apartment was once, we were told, the chief guest-chamber, and was hung around with costly tapestry ; now its walls are stained with damp, and nothing disguises the bare, rough masonry. Cote is an exceedingly interesting old home, and picturesque besides ; I fear that the hand of man has wrought it more injury than that of Time, as is, unfortunately, too frequently the case with old historic buildings ; it was one of the most rewarding of the many discoveries of our journey. I wonder how many travelled Englishmen are aware even of the existence of Cote, or have heard of its story ?

Next we took a quiet stroll round the exterior of the house, that appears perhaps—the decaying wing excepted—more worn and old from without than from within, owing to the sharp contrast of its time-stained, weathered walls with the fresh green vitality of Nature around, for Nature each year

renews her youth, whilst with every passing summer and winter an ancient building but adds to its ancientness. We had wandered accidentally to still another old romance in stone—a home of past days in the heart of a secluded and peaceful country, far from rail and near no town, so that there is nothing to disturb its century-gathered tranquillity. Over it there brooded a delightful, slumberous calm—the calm of a more restful age than ours. It is good to escape sometimes from the rush and whirl of the modern, money-making world,—to forget, for a while, its striving and ugliness, and to enjoy, if only for one brief hour, the soothing hush and placidity of some such old-world spot as this, where steam-engines, telegraphs, telephones, aeroplanes, and such latter-day inventions, seem as things you have dreamt about rather than realities.

A country lane of many windings, and narrow in places even for a country lane, leads from the far-away main roads to the village of Cote, and a byway from the village leads to Cote House; but you have first to discover the lane if you desire to get there, for, as far as I can remember, there is no finger-post to guide you. Presumably Cote is too unimportant to have the way to it pointed out. Cote is situated in a remote, little-travelled corner of England, where you meet no one but farmers, farm-hands, and primitive cottagers, and those infrequently; it is a land severely left alone by the tourist, for there is nothing whatever to interest him therein; neither is it readily to be got at, for it is bounded on the north by the breezy Cotswolds, and



COTE, FROM THE MOAT.

to the south by the narrow upper Thames, where bridges are few and whose waters are shallow and reed-grown, so difficult of navigation ; and to the east and west by a purely agricultural country not too well supplied with roads, which also are none of the best.

We left Cote and our kind host and hostess with regret, but we had already stayed a long while there, and we could not remain for ever. After an enjoyable spin through a lovely though lonely country, so lonely that we did not see a soul, even in the fields, we found ourselves at New Bridge on the upper Thames, at which pleasant spot the river appeared so small a stream that we were surprised when we learnt its name. New Bridge, an ancient structure of narrow pointed arches with big buttresses between, belies its title, for it was old when Elizabeth was on the throne, being built early in the thirteenth century, and, according to learned antiquaries, is the oldest of all the Thames bridges, though, to my inexperienced eye, that of Radcot, a little higher up-stream, looks quite as old and is almost as eye-pleasing. If I mistake not, there was a cosy little hostel close by the bridge, and now I wish we had stopped to sample it, for, perchance, we might have discovered there one of those delightful, old-fashioned, river-side fishing inns "kept by a very honest woman," an inn such as that prince of good fellows, Izaak Walton, loved so dearly. The very name of fishing inn spells enchantment to many, and of the number I am one, for it calls back to my memory a host of red-letter days spent amidst the

most charming and restful of surroundings—surroundings consisting of cool, gurgling waters, of shady woods, of meadows deep in the greenest of grass, of grey boulder and peeps of distant hills. At one of these old-fashioned inns of the right sort, and there is a virtue in that clause, you are sure of simplicity combined with plain but wholesome fare (things rarely to be obtained to-day), and they nearly always possess a little bit of garden, gay and sweet with flowers, leading down to the river-side—a garden wherein you may enjoy a nocturnal pipe in perfect contentment. Those in quest of the simple life may surely find it, if it is to be found, at the retired, rural fishing inn. There is, too, an old-time friendliness about these anglers' resorts, and though the talk thereat be of fish and fishing, and nothing else, somehow it seldom wearies me; I am never tired of hearing of that wonderful fish that a fellow-guest relates he just failed to land; he would not be a true angler if he had not that tale to tell, one that the landlord is well acquainted with! Every angler worthy of the name has hooked and lost the very biggest fish that ever swam in the river, and the size of the fish, sufficiently surprising at the start, is apt unconsciously to grow astonishingly in confidential chat over a second, or a third, pipe and glass of "toddy"; still, it is all harmless and entertaining romancing, it delights the relator and does not deceive the listener. But fishermen are the best of good company, though the tales they tell are often, as Andrew Lang puts it, "pretty steep"; still, they help to pass the time pleasantly

enough away. Perhaps, on further thought, it was as well we did not stop to sample the inn at New Bridge, for the ideal our fancies cherished might have been shattered. Now, as Wordsworth sings of Yarrow—

We have a vision of our own,
Ah ! why should we undo it ?

And yet, should I ever be near New Bridge again, I would risk the chance of being disillusioned ; for though pleasant impressions are most delightful things to possess, still one may forfeit a beautiful reality by the dread of destroying an ideal. And after all is sung or said, the reality profits more than the poetic conception. One may suffer grievous loss by being (to quote Wordsworth again) “unwilling to surrender treasured dreams,” which may not be wholly dreams ! Once did I discover, in an artists’- and anglers’-haunted hostelry set away remote in the wilds of Wales—so remote that no tourist proper ever made his appearance there, and the tripper was a being unknown, undreamt of—a resting-spot that, truthfully I can assert, exceeded my reasonable ideal. I came to it by pure and happy chance, having hopelessly lost my way, and being, besides, belated, glad at the moment to obtain simply shelter for the night. But there I stayed on for one whole delightful month, going out sketching day after day with one or another of the goodly company of artists, or setting forth a-fishing with one or more of the friendly anglers foregathered there. Now, looking back on a life not

wholly without its joys, I can most honestly declare that never did I spend so blissful a time. Yet had not kindly fate compelled me to stop a night there, I might readily have passed that homely little inn unregarded by. Many a time and often have I thus been benighted at a lonely wayside hotel, and have afterwards had cause to bless the fortunate circumstance—which, however, did not seem so fortunate at the moment. It is such delightful and unexpected experiences that add so greatly to the charms of desultory travel; and if they come but rarely, perhaps they are the more to be valued on that account. There is always present to the wanderer out of the beaten track the pleasant possibilities of making such discoveries, and the thrill of innocent pride and the joy of them! To know they may be made—that is the supreme thing! Who can tell, when exploring an unknown country, what the day may reveal, or the next day, or the day after that? for should one of them fail, there comes the following morrow and the fortune of it. The possibilities of the unknown keep the mind in a state of interested expectancy, and ever entice the traveller on. And to be interested in a journey is to enjoy it.

From New Bridge we drove in a southerly direction, not from any preference on our part—had the country appeared interesting, we would just as readily have gone east or west—but there was only one road, and that led towards the south, so to the south we went quite contentedly. Our one object was to explore the country, and to avoid the towns as much as possible; and by keeping to the byways

we almost automatically escaped the latter, though, at a pinch, we had no hesitation in availing ourselves of them when needing a night's lodging—no country inn, more to our mind, being discoverable.

So we wandered on, now on a main road, now on a rural lane, but mostly on a lane. And so we came to the neighbouring little villages of East and West Hanney, with little of interest in them, and only pleasurable because of their rusticity and the lazy greeting they give one. Therein the pulse of life beats slowly, and the haste of the century finds no place. Then through a country not remarkable for its beauty we reached Steventon, a low-lying village, manifestly liable to floods in the winter-time, for there is a raised causeway of cobbles in it; but nothing to detain the traveller, unless it be a few half-timbered cottages—pretty enough, but not frantically so. Indeed, we were beginning to feel a little disappointed with the country and the villages about; perhaps we had become a trifle exacting. The country was flat enough to delight a Dutchman, but a trifle monotonous to one of another breed. Truly, the sunshine did its best to make the land look bright and cheerful, and a bracing breeze blew over it that was welcome, for the day was warm; but still we were not impressed, and the next village of West Hagbourne we came to did nothing to enliven our spirits. "If we had only taken a guide-book with us," exclaimed my wife, "we should never have come to this desolate region." "Nor have discovered Cote or the dozen of other places we have," replied I. "Besides, I

pity the man" (or woman) "who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry, 'Tis all barren!'" The quotation saved the situation!

Then the entirely unexpected happened. We drove into a picture, or rather, to be more accurate, into the quaintly pretty village of East Hagbourne—as pretty and as interesting a village as the eye of an artist or an antiquary could desire, or expect to find. "How about your guide-books now?" I exclaimed triumphantly. "I'll lay a wager that not one of the compilers of the many have ever seen East Hagbourne. The bit of plain country you complained about just served as a foil to enhance its charms. And pray tell me, Did you ever see a prettier village?" And this is what we saw before us: a scattered collection of old and gabled houses, homelike, mellow, and picturesque, every one of them—buildings such as artists put into their paintings; only these were delightfully real, and not mere poetic conceptions. In the centre of the village street stood a fine and ancient market-cross, where it has stood for centuries, its worn steps and tall tapering shaft being happily intact, only the cross that formerly topped it having disappeared; this has been replaced by a square stone sun-dial, but so long ago was it done that the dial, with a ball above for ornament, is now itself so weather-stained and crumbled, that it looks as old as the rest, and a fitting part of it. It is said that, when Charles I. was fighting for his crown, some of Cromwell's troopers from Abingdon rode through the village. They were, fortunately, in some haste, but



"THE SUN-DIAL," EAST HAGBOURNE.

halted long enough to remove the cross, without doing further hurt. Probably, had they not been in a hurry, they would have levelled the whole "superstitious thing" to the ground. But the cross had to go at any risk, for a cross was to the Puritans as a red rag to a bull, possibly even more enraging.

East Hagbourne is the ideal village that one dreams about, but hardly expects to find in actual being; so the greater is the joy of such a discovery—it is a poem rather than a place. And the great charm of it is that its picturesqueness is a natural growth; there is nothing artificial, over neat, or forced about it, as in the prim and very proper model village, which always strikes me as theatrical, so much so that when in one I am always expecting the actors and dancers to come upon the scene. East Hagbourne is the genuine article—a beautiful, every-day village, but wholly unconscious of its beauty. Other nations may boast of their cities and towns, but in the matter of picturesque villages no land can compare with England; and the charm of these is their variety, for no two are alike, any more than two human beings are.

To-day the East Hagbourne dwellers appear to have forgotten all about the cross, for they call it the sun-dial. "And very useful it were, too," one old body informed me unbidden as she leant over her garden fence watching me take the photograph; and whilst I was photographing her tongue wagged on unceasingly. "Very useful in the old days when folks had few clocks or watches, and them as they had weren't much good to tell the hours by. But,

bless you, sir, country folks bain't as usefully eddicated as they used to be. Would you believe it, there bain't no one in the village now as can read the dial properly; they don't know how. Why, when I was young I was taught to read the dial as a part of my eddication. The young folk of to-day thinks themselves mighty larned, that they do; but it's all book-larning. My fayther couldn't read much, for he had to spell his words out; but he could thatch a rick, plough a field, milk a cow, or do anything useful. That's the sort of man that's wanted in the country, not a book-larned one. Why, there bain't but very few people to-day as can thatch a rick as it should be thatched. And as for the girls, it's all book-larning with 'em too; nothing useful they larns at school, such as to cook a meal, or to wash and iron. The boys have larnt to read, and what they reads does 'em more harm nor good. Why, my boy came home one night, and says he, 'I've been reading all about highwaymen, and I thinks I'd like to be one.' And you knows you can't get a living at that nowadays. Then says he, 'I'd be a pirate.' Says I to him, 'You'll go off to bed and have a spanking.'" And so the old body gabbled on, much to her gratification. "It's a relief," she explained, "to speak out plainly sometimes." I think she must have experienced a good deal of relief that day!

Whether "larned" or "unlarned," however, one good point about the population, young and old, of East Hagbourne impressed us, and that was their thoughtful courtesy, to which I gladly bear my

testimony—a courtesy, by the way, not wholly confined to East Hagbourne, but which we met with almost universally at the more remote places where we stopped; the more remote the more pronounced it was, if anything. Now, when we were photographing the cross, a number of youths had gathered about, attracted by the sight of the car; but, without being asked, or without even a hint that they would be in the way, they one and all carefully and purposely kept out of the view, instead of standing, as youngsters are inclined to do, right in front of the camera “to be took.” Later on, when photographing some of the picturesque old houses, we thought that possibly a figure or two might improve the picture. Then the children we found were only too delighted to be in it and to pose for us, but they only did this upon being invited. Would all children were like those of East Hagbourne!

Rising boldly and darkly grey above the village, and away at one end of it, we noticed the tall tower of its ancient church, and thither we next went. On approaching this we were struck by the quaint, carved stone bell-cote set on the top—a work of art, ornamented with canopy and pinnacles, and in which hung a single small bell. As far as my knowledge extends, gleaned mostly, though not wholly, from personal observation, this is a unique feature in English churches. It may be also in foreign ones, but of these I am not competent to write so surely. A bell, or bells, hung in a wooden turret, that is placed on the top of a church tower, is no great rarity; and where lack of pence prevents the

building of a tower, a timber cage in a churchyard to contain the bells is occasionally to be found, as in the remarkable instance at East Bergholt (a spot we shall come to later on). But a bell-cote like this, elaborately carved in stone and pinnacled, not an after-thought, but manifestly forming a part of the original design, I have never seen or heard of before. Nor why it should have been introduced, I cannot imagine, seeing that there is ample and suitable space for bells in the tower below. Probably it was a mere whim of the monkish builder. Anyway, I am glad it is there, for it is quaint and effective. We observed also that on the top of the roof of the stairway turret, or what we took to be a stairway turret, was a weather-vane in the shape of a dragon or some such creature. Even this was of unusual design, and noticeable because of it. Personally, I delight in originality, so these trifles attracted my attention possibly beyond their importance.

Within the building we found much to interest us. Some of the corbels were roughly but cleverly carved into the resemblance of grinning faces, and how could any man or woman, I wonder, take a sermon seriously with those faces grinning down upon him or her? Built in between the arches of the chancel we noticed one carved head that shows a contorted face, such as a man might make in the agony of a bad toothache—the very stone seemed to be suffering! Those medieval sculptors, what rare artists they were, what humour they possessed—so abounding that even within the sacred pre-

cincts of a church they could not resist giving outward expression thereto! They loved to joke in stone, and to make merry in wood, as various village fanes can prove; and many's the smile their comical creations have afforded me. I love their grinning demons, mostly found on their gargoyles, harmless, good-natured, grotesque demons, that leer at you through their wicked eyes down from the roofs of the sacred edifices in a rare friendly and fascinating way. Those old monks, whose consummate skill has glorified many an ancient edifice, have gone to dust and ashes ages since; I doubt if ever we shall look upon their like again, and I trust that their souls have long ere this escaped from Purgatory, for they have frequently afforded me much innocent mirth, though to go to church in search of amusement may seem a strange thing to do, and yet often have I found it there!

The church, we noticed, possesses an exceptionally fine open oak roof, adorned with many devices, though we could not comprehend the meaning of them all, and we further noticed, hanging down within the tower, the weights that drove the ancient clock. There are several brasses and monuments on the floor and walls of considerable interest. One brass is to "Clarisia Wyndsore, formerly lady of West Hakborn, wife of John York, who caused this chapel to be made," and who died "March 1403." So that it would appear that Hagbourne was originally spelt Hakborn. Though, perhaps, it would not do to be too sure of the fact, for is it not recorded that a lady of quality in the olden days

wrote an epitaph to her husband, in which she misspelt several words, and when the fact was deferentially pointed out to her, she declared that a lady of her position must be allowed to spell as she thought fit, and she prevailed? So that in the good old times to be "one of the quality" was to be one's own orthographist, and to be happily independent of the Dictionary!

There were two roads out of East Hagbourne, but having no destination in view, we had no difficulty in making a selection—either suited us equally. We had no need to ask our way, for we had no way to ask! We just took the road ahead so as to save turning the car round; had the car faced the other way, along that we should have gone. Could any method of touring be more simple or more unconventional? Once again we found ourselves in a wide, open country of big tilled fields, over which the wind swept keen and unrestrained, and the far-reaching, level landscape faded away into a long line of circling blue. We should have preferred scenery a trifle less monotonous, but the traveller cannot expect to have all things to his liking.

It was far on in the afternoon, and the sky was growing golden in the west, though barred with clouds of purple grey that promised rain, but where we should find our night's quarters we had no idea—we merely contentedly drove on till an inn should materialise. We placed our trust in the road, and eventually it brought us to Abingdon. The road was rough and winding, but it is a good road that

takes the traveller to a good inn, and this it did! At Abingdon we were recommended "The Lion," an old coaching hostelry that has lived to witness the revival of the road. Just as we had driven under the shelter of its hospitable archway, down came the rain, and then we blessed the good old-fashioned arrangement that allowed us to descend from the car at our leisure in the dry, and out of the street and the public gaze. At the side-door stood the landlord, who greeted us with a ready smile—a very different welcome to that of the usual stony-eyed glare of the modern hotel manager or porter. Our landlord sported a white waistcoat, whilst the button-hole in his coat was adorned by a rose, and he had the courtly manner of the rare old race of landlords of the prosperous coaching hostelries—"respectful, easy, pleasant, and polite." A landlord after Dickens' own heart! "Madam would like a cup of tea at once; perhaps she is tired with the journey? Madam shall have tea without delay, and if you care to leave it to me, I will see that you have a nice little dinner; unless, possibly, there is anything special you might like. Boots shall take your baggage in at once, and the maid will show you your room; and would the gentleman honour me by taking a glass of something with me?" We almost deceived ourselves into imagining that the old days had come back again, and that we had arrived in a postchaise and not in a motor car.

During the evening the landlord entertained me, for an hour or more, with pleasant gossip of people

and places, of other days and other ways, and of the past story of his ancient inn, for he knew much of men and of the world, bygone and present, and many and curious were the tales he told. I have a vision of him now as he sat in an easy-chair of the smoke-room, a glass of "toddy" by his side, puffing away at a long churchwarden pipe, with a beaming face, grey hair, white waistcoat, button-hole, and all. A jovial host was he ; may his days of hostelling be long in the land !

CHAPTER XX

Water-colour sketches as guides—Buckingham—Maids Morton—A graceful epitaph—Stopped on the road by deer—Towcester—A puzzling sign—"The World's End"—The homeland of the Franklins—A Saxon towered church—A curious round house—Thrapstone—A quaint and ancient hostelry—Horn windows.

GLANCING over the map of England next morning, whilst tracing our previous day's route thereon, my eye caught the name of King's Lynn. The name brought to recollection a number of water-colour drawings I had seen some time before of that ancient port and market town, and—if the artist had not romanced overmuch, as artists sometimes do—these sketches proved Lynn to be a most picturesque and delightfully quaint old place, possessed of ruined towers and crumbling gateways, of Dutchlike houses, and of a sleepy harbour favoured by pleasant, old-fashioned sailing ships.

One drawing amongst the number, bearing the title of "Lynn Ferry," especially appealed to my sense of the picturesque, for it showed a curious timber pier, bent and broken, but not too much bent and broken, stretching into the river. At the end of the pier were many seaweed-grown steps, and at the foot of the steps was a primitive,

cumbersome ferry-boat, propelled by two big oars. Across the river the ancient irregular-roofed town formed an effective background, in which the cupola-capped custom-house was the most prominent feature—a building that might have been bodily transferred there from Flanders; and farther away was a confusion of sails and tall masts, revealed through a mystery of poetic smoke.

Then a sudden inspiration came to me. Why should we not drive right across England to Lynn; if that town were only half as quaint as the artist represented it to be, it would be well worth seeing. For once we would have a possible destination in view; I say possible, for we reserved to ourselves the right to change our mind on the way; so long accustomed had we been to irresponsible wandering, we declined definitely to bind ourselves even to this limited programme. Freedom was the essence of our tour, and free we would be to the end of it!

A study of the map showed me that we might drive all the way from Abingdon to Lynn, a distance roughly of 125 miles, and only pass through one large commercial town, which was Northampton. So it was settled that we would start forth with Lynn as our object point, though the likelihood that we might turn up elsewhere and never see Lynn at all was present to us. Indeed, when eventually we turned up at Lynn, I think we were both surprised at doing so, for the glamour of true travel lies in the journey rather than in the destination!

Leaving Abingdon, we avoided Oxford by taking

to cross-country roads, for Oxford had nothing fresh to show us, and we avoided all cities and towns as much as practicable. So far we had travelled hundreds of miles and had escaped all busy commercial towns excepting Bristol, of which we had no pleasant memory; Bridgwater was comparatively a small place, so did not count; we drove round, not through, Southampton; and Exeter is not commercial. After a drive that was hilly at first we came to Bicester, a clean and tranquil town that we passed through without a stop, for we saw nothing there to stop for. Hitherto we had meandered along in a leisurely fashion; to-day, for a change and for a while, we determined to motor on without loitering. But it was only for a while, for beyond Northampton, all the way along the lovely but little-travelled valley of the Nene, we found so much to delight and interest us that we loitered there perhaps more than on any other portion of our journey. But as far as Northampton, excepting at two specially attractive spots, we were content to enjoy the country lazily, to view the landscape broadly, and to trouble little about detail. Thus it happened that without a halt "we made" Buckingham, noting on passing by its quaint gaol, built in poor imitation of a Norman castle. We took it for the town hall, but were assured it was the gaol.

A little way beyond Buckingham we passed through a very pretty village of thatched and timber cottages. Maids Morton was its name, and its picturesqueness was irresistible, so a halt was

called there to secure some photographic reminders of the place. Maids Morton is also fortunate in its church, which is of much beauty both within and without. It contains a marble monument to the memory of Mrs. Penelope Verney, on which the following neat epitaph is inscribed :—

Under this stone doth lye,
As much virtue as could die,
Which, when alive, did vigour give
To as much beauty as could live.

The art of writing graceful epitaphs appears to be one of the many lost ones, or is it that such things have gone out of fashion, for I cannot remember ever having come upon a modern epitaph worthy of note?

After Maids Morton the country, for a space, was wild, undulating, and well wooded; then as we were driving leisurely along we were suddenly brought to a standstill by a gate closed across the road—a thing one hardly expects to find on a highway in these days when turnpikes have been abolished; we were obliged to stop the car and get down to open the gate, but, fortunately, were charged nothing for our trouble nor for the privilege of being detained. Then we found ourselves on a fenceless road leading through a wide and well-timbered park, where we were again promptly pulled up by a large herd of deer, which bounded towards the car and then surrounded it, apparently impelled by curiosity, the very last thing I should have expected the “timid” deer to do. Cows are

difficult enough to deal with on the road, for they likewise show no fear of a car, and, if loose on the road, generally quietly meander right in front of you, still after a time they will move on even though they do so with great deliberation ; but tame deer "go one better," at least the deer we met with that day just stood in front of our bonnet gazing inquiringly at it without showing any desire to move, so that we had actually, very cautiously and very slowly, to push our way along. I have been accustomed to associate deer with mountain, moor, and forest, and to imagine them as being by nature wild, roving, and difficult of approach ; but these were of the domesticated, pampered, and petted kind that had no fear of man or car. Not even our horn, loudly blown, alarmed them in the least. Then we dropped down to Towcester, and finding that it was market day there and that the streets of the little town were crowded with farmers' conveyances, we made haste to get away.

From Towcester to Northampton we had an excellent road, as most Northamptonshire roads are, they being, on the whole, according to my experience, the finest in the kingdom ; certainly ours was broad, smooth of surface, and easy of gradient, though between those places indifferent as to scenery. We looked forward with no pleasure to traversing the busy, tram-laid streets of Northampton : I would we had known how simple and easy our progress through it was to be.

On entering the town our attention was arrested

by a sign hung out from a shop that boldly displayed this curious legend—

May the trade of the town be trodden under foot by all the world.

We read this with considerable astonishment, and wondered that any citizen of the place should dare thus to decry his town and its trade. We even wondered more how it came about that the enterprising, and none too gentle, inhabitants thereof (I have heard them cynically termed “lambs” for their unlamb-like qualities) allowed such a provoking sign to hang there unmolested—when we suddenly recalled to mind that the trade of the town was boot-making!

It is generally a matter of some difficulty to find one's way through a strange place, so we pulled up to make inquiries. Thereupon we were informed that we need not go through “the city” at all unless we wished to do so—as though any sane traveller would wish such a thing!—and that we could avoid all the traffic and the trams by taking a certain road that was pointed out to us. This road, which circled round the town, proved to be wide and almost traffickless, so that we were soon again in the country. I only wish that other large towns, to the relief of their congested streets and so to their own advantage, would follow this excellent example of Northampton. Just before the coming of the railway, that great road engineer, Telford, was at work on a scheme of loop streets through some of the large towns in order to secure a less obstructed way for the mail coaches and other fast-posting

traffic, but, unfortunately, the scheme was never carried out, as the Parliament of the period, which purposed paying for the work, foresaw the doom of the road. Other improvements in the great highways of the land of the kind that had already been made in the fine Holyhead road, for which plans had been prepared, were also given up. Had the railway only been invented a little later, our roads would have been vastly better! We have very pleasant recollections of Northampton, because we saw so little of it, and though this may sound an unkind way of putting it, no unkindness is meant!

Beyond Northampton the scenery improved with every mile we went, and soon we arrived at a little lonely inn rejoicing in the curious title of "The World's End": it was not even at the end of the road, much less at the end of the world! On the other side of the way we pulled up beneath the welcome shade of some overhanging trees, for the sun shone brightly down and the day was distinctly hot; moreover, mortal man is sometimes thirsty, and I owned to a thirst that was worth having with the near prospect of a glass of cool, clear ale to slake it. Besides, the sign of the inn struck me as quaint, and perhaps the landlord might be able to enlighten me upon it. The ale was excellent, the landlord not adverse to a chat, but why his inn was so quaintly named he could not say, more than that it was so far from anywhere. One fact about this primitive wayside hostel, however, we learnt, namely, that it formerly possessed a signboard painted by no less a personage than Hogarth,

which, as might be expected, has long since disappeared. Hogarth at one time was staying at Ecton, a village close by, working on some pictures for the then owner of the manor-house there, during which period the master frequently found his way to "The World's End," and it appears that he was soon on a very friendly footing with the host thereof. But how he came to paint the signboard, and whether it was done for love or for money, rumour is silent. One might perhaps hazard a guess that it was painted to pay the artist's "reckoning." Hogarth, as might be expected of him, had his own original ideas of painting this sign, and disregarding the previous one, he pictured the globe on fire as his conception of The World's End. Truly a curious conceit.

The name of Ecton had a familiar sound to us, though it was some time before we could solve the reason why. Then suddenly we remembered that Ecton was one of the many places we had jotted down in our note-book as being a spot we ought one day to see when our wanderings took us within reasonable distance of it, and there it was, only a few minutes' walk from where we were! The chief, if not the sole, interest of Ecton lies in the fact that it was the home of the ancestors of Benjamin Franklin, a fact better known, I imagine, to Americans than to Englishmen. There is, too, Sulgrave, another remote village in this historic county of Northampton, where flourished the good old English family of Washington, from which sprung the first president of the United States, and

to the credit of his forefathers he was, if I quote Mark Twain from memory correctly, "the only American who never told a lie!" And Sulgrave also, I venture to assert, is far better known to our transatlantic cousins than to ourselves. Indeed, I think I might safely wager that there is not one Britisher in ten thousand who could tell off-hand where Sulgrave is.

A short stroll brought us to Ecton, a primitive village without the compensating virtue of being picturesque; not exactly ugly, but, like some very worthy people, uninteresting; and to be uninteresting is to-day to be an acknowledged failure, whether in man or place. We have it on the authority of Benjamin Franklin himself that his family had lived at Ecton "for three centuries, and how much longer I know not." But three centuries is a fair space of time, and sufficient to establish the title of homeland. For all good Americans, with Emerson, look upon England as "The Old Home," regarding it with a love that a child gives to its mother. Germany may be the Fatherland, but England, to all her sons the wide world over, is the Motherland!

At Ecton we first made our way to the churchyard in hopes that we might there discover some memorial of the Franklins. Then we began a search amongst the leaning headstones, most of whose ancient inscriptions had wasted away or were, more or less, obliterated by clinging moss or creeping lichen. Just as we had given up our search in despair we came to an upright tombstone

close to the church porch, on which may still clearly be read the following inscription to one of the family, though of a comparatively late date :—

Here Lyeth
the Body of
Thomas Franklin
who Departed this
Life Ianuary the 6th.
Anno Dni 1702.
In the Sixty Fifth
yeare of his age.

As we were copying this inscription we became aware of the presence of a woman watching us from over the churchyard wall, apparently curious to discover what, as strangers, our business there could be. So we took the opportunity of asking her if she knew anything about the Franklin family, as we deemed it just possible that some descendants thereof might still be living in the locality. She hesitated to reply, then after pondering the matter over, exclaimed, "I don't think as how I do, but you see I've only been here ten years, and that bain't long enough to get properly acquainted with the people or the place." We thereupon apologised for having troubled her, explaining that had we known she had only lived in Ecton for so short a time we should not have asked her such a question. And if any of my readers consider that remark sarcastic, of course they are at liberty to do so. The church of Ecton is ancient enough ; we noticed a much-weathered stone built into the porch, on which we could just trace, cut in Gothic letters, the

following Latin legend, "A. Dñi. MCCCC. LVI. EDIFICATII." But it is not beautiful, externally at any rate; of the interior I can say nothing, as the church door was carefully locked, and to start forth clerk-hunting on that hot day we were not inclined. I do not know how the Ecton people manage when they are ill, but as we wandered back to the car we observed a notice in a cottage window that ran thus:—

Messages
For Mr. Dash
Surgeon
May be left here
On Tuesdays and Fridays.

A man was passing at the time of our reading this, and of him we inquired how they got along without a doctor living there. "Get along," replied he; "we gets along right enough. We never want a doctor until us be dying, and then a doctor bain't much good!"

We had not proceeded far from Ecton—a bare two miles it seemed to us—when a little way off, to the right of our road, we espied the hoary and ancient church tower of Earl's Barton church darkly silhouetted against the bright sky, with the roof-trees of the lowly village of that name clustering below and close around it. Now this church tower is, I believe, without gainsaying, the most remarkable as well as the most ancient one in England, and in many respects by far the most interesting. A grand survival it is of Saxon masonry, raised

some unknown date before the Conquest, that has happily remained unmolested ever since, a splendid testimony to the enduring qualities of the building. The tower greatly impressed us, not only because of its undoubted antiquity, but because of its uncommon form and its look of sombre strength. It has been said that "there is a certain barbaric grandeur about it, but its construction is bad." So declares the critic. That it has a certain grandeur he is forced reluctantly to acknowledge, though he qualifies it with the cheap sneer of "barbaric," possibly because the workmanship thereof is rough according to modern ideas, for as a rule the modern man sees no beauty in the marks of the craftsman's chisel, nor in variety of surface, but adores meaningless smoothness and mechanical finish, so easy of accomplishment. The human touch must be effaced else the work is in sooth barbaric! That its construction is bad is surely a strange criticism to make of a building that has stood unhurt the stress and storms of long centuries, and still stands, with all the appearance of sufficient strength to outlast centuries still. I should like to know what its ancient architect's ideas would be of some of our flimsy, done-by-lowest-contract church structures of to-day!

The general impression of the tower rising "four-squared" from the ground, without relying on or needing the adventitious aid of supporting buttresses, is one of solid strength, and strength is surely the first essential of sound construction! Ornamentation may well come afterwards, and yet Earl's Barton tower does not want for this. What

I may have read about the building I have now forgotten, and I am glad that it is so, for it allows me to form my own opinions unhampered by those of others. And looking broadly at the tower as a whole, I conjecture that the hands which raised it had but recently escaped from wood-framing construction, and being familiar with this, repeated it, as far as the material allowed, in more enduring stone. I may be wrong, but the long strips of upright stone, and the horizontal ones crossing them, suggest to me the form of timber-framing. However, my readers may judge of this for themselves from my photograph reproduced in the frontispiece.

On each side of the top of the tower are open spaces, with stone balusters between, to allow the sounds of the bells to go forth, and the shape of these balusters reminds one again strongly of woodwork. On the lowest story, close to a balustered window, is a circular stone tablet with a cross boldly engraved thereon—presumably a consecration cross. However, the tower is a thing to be seen rather than described, for the impression the sombre and substantial specimen of ancient craftsmanship produces on the sympathetic observer cannot be set down in mere words, even when they are aided by illustration. Hundreds of church towers scattered over the land more or less repeat one another. Truly, they vary as to type, but the type becomes monotonous by the constant repetition of similar outline and detail. They lack originality; Earl's Barton tower is unique, and refreshing because of its striking individuality. It might be copied, if

any builder dared to be so bold as to do so, but at least you feel of itself it is no copy. It may be barbaric, it may not be beautiful, but it is striking. I would glory in being called barbaric if I could design anything half as good.

Whilst we were photographing the tower a man came into the churchyard and approached us. We guessed he was the clerk, and that, seeing strangers there, he scented a possible tip. At any rate our first guess proved correct, for he presently introduced himself as that individual. He had a pleasant face and was pleasant spoken, but his dress was peculiar, in that he wore a faded brown coat with a wide strip of new blue cloth let in down the back, the effect of which curious combination of the new with the old was, to say the least, somewhat odd. He certainly did not study appearances. We said nothing, but manifestly he had observed the glance we gave at his raiment, for he exclaimed, "You're admiring my coat. I grant it ain't much to look at, but it's comfortable, and I don't owe my tailor anything. I tells the local folk as how it's the latest London fashion; but the fact is I don't wear it from choice. Times bain't over prosperous with me, and Earl's Barton is not exactly the place to make a fortune in, so I've to make do with my son's old coats, and as they be a size too small for me I gets the missus to put in any bit of any cloth that is handy at the back so as I can wear them. But you can't rightly judge an animal by his skin, as they say, so you must not judge a poor man by his coat." Manifestly the clerk was a bit of a character, and

we felt well pleased to meet with him. Like the old church tower, he was original.

“ I suppose you are one of the oldest inhabitants ? ” we remarked, by the way of opening up a conversation. “ Well,” responded he, “ I’ve been in the place a longish time, but folk live so long here doing nothing that you wants to be pretty old to be the oldest of ’em. And the people be peculiar ; they bain’t very good, none of ’em, nor yet very bad. I bees a fair sample of the lot, I’m a-thinking. Yes, the tower be very old and curious. Perhaps you would like to see inside the church. I thought as how you would, and that brought me here.” “ Business is business,” and the clerk’s business was, I presume, to show us the church, ours to see it and to tip him ; so to the church we went. The clerk vastly interested us. As he was so original, we thought we would be original too, so we tipped him, and liberally, for his quaintness *before* he showed us over the building. He took the tip with many thanks, declaring, as he quietly pocketed it, that really he did not expect any such thing, and by his manner he almost made us feel as though he were doing us a favour in accepting it, for there is an art in receiving a tip that makes the giver seem under the obligation. That clerk was simply delightful ; he was a man of humour of the dry sort, not the sweet that cloy. I think we understood one another. He even appeared to appreciate our company, for more than once he declared his time was of no consequence, and that it was a real pleasure to him to talk with an intelligent stranger. And

the subtle compliment "intelligent" did not escape our notice. The interior of the church was interesting, but the clerk was much more so: the interior was not unique—there were many like it—but the clerk was! At one time we even felt uneasy about that tip, deeming possibly, in spite of the shabby coat and his tale of bad times, that the man was above accepting any gratuity. We even ventured to apologise for the deed, lest we might by any extraordinary chance have hurt his feelings. He at once took in the situation, and promptly put us at our ease by volunteering to accept another tip on the spot, which was thoughtfully kind of him.

Upon entering the church the clerk pointed out to us the fine and elaborately carved south Norman doorway. "You will note, sir, its beautiful beak ornaments, which are a special feature of it." Now our architectural education did not, unfortunately, extend to this particular detail, so we sought enlightenment on the subject. The clerk let us down gently—he almost apologised for his superior knowledge—and explained that even he would not have been aware of the beak ornamentation had not one day a visitor learned in such matters pointed it out to him. And what we saw was a number of sculptured heads, some almost Egyptian in feeling, joined together by stones below, cut to a point that bore a certain resemblance to a big bird's beak—that is, if you looked for such a resemblance—though, I take it, the ancient craftsman sought no such imitation. Now, whenever I come upon a Norman church

doorway I shall look out for the beak ornamentation, and should I discover it there I shall know that such doorway is a specimen of the highest development of Norman art in that direction. So one travels and learns. Even a driving tour through England may become a matter of education, artistic and otherwise! For instance, before this journey I was shamefully ignorant of even the existence of the river Nene, and the lovely valley through which it flows so tranquilly was a revelation of quiet beauty to me.

Within the church the clerk called our attention to the genuine old carved oak screen, which had originally been coloured and gilt, and a very fine screen it is, one that does infinite credit to its ancient carver. "That screen," said the clerk, "is over three hundred years old; I saw it being put up." "What," exclaimed we, "are you really as old as that?" for at the moment his statement astonished and puzzled us. But the clerk explained he did not mean when it was first erected, but when it was restored and replaced there.

In the chancel we noticed some well-preserved Norman arcading, and in the nave a handsome Jacobean pulpit. Next the clerk pointed out a long narrow cupboard in the north wall. "No one knows," said he, "what that was for; there is just about room for a small man to stand within, and that is all." We suggested that possibly it might have been used to keep a processional cross in. "Perhaps it might," responded the clerk meditatively, "and then it might not." He would not

commit himself, but considered our suggestion plausible, and we felt, I trust not unduly, flattered thereby. On the wall by the tower we observed two brasses on one stone slab of a man and a woman, but the figures were without inscriptions, though the matrices that had manifestly contained the latter were plainly visible on the slab. In brasses being missing there is, alas, nothing unusual, unless it be the fact that it is the figures that have generally disappeared whilst the inscription remains, for reasons that are manifest, as the inscription might the more easily betray the thief. Then finding nothing more to interest us within the church, we took our departure.

A short drive brought us to Wellingborough, an ugly little town ; we were thankful it was not larger. Then we came to a pretty, open stretch of country, over which our elevated road gave us wide and pleasant prospects,—prospects that appeared to be ever bounded by one vast forest owing to the blending together in the distance of the many meadow and hedgerow trees. So through this pleasant and pastoral country we motored dreamily on, with nothing to call for special remark until we came to a curious round house by the roadside, of three stories and of some size. As round houses are uncommon (I have sometimes seen cottages so built, but never before, I think, a house so large) it attracted our attention ; and when we arrived at it we were astonished to read on its circular front the following announcement in big, bold letters :—

PANORAMA
WATERLOO VICTORY

JUNE 18 .

A.D.

1815.

What the more surprised us about this notice was the fact that the house stood in a lonely position, apparently remote from anywhere, and as far as we could judge, it must have always stood so. It was a wayside enigma, for if the panorama were a public show, where could the public be expected to come from to see it? To set up a panorama thus in a big round building, right in the heart of a little-populated country, struck us as a most incomprehensible act. To satisfy our curiosity we pulled up at the door and applied to see the panorama. A woman, after some time, came forth in response to our knock, and, in reply to our request, said, "The panorama as was here has been done away with ages ago; it be a farm-house now." "Then why," we queried, "do you keep that notice up? It seems a strange thing to do surely, and it must give you a lot of trouble answering the door to people calling to see the panorama." "Bless you, sir," she responded, "we don't mind the trouble; it's a bit lonely like living here, and it's a relief to see a stranger to talk to at times, though there bain't many strangers as passes this way; however, we do get one a-calling now and again. I don't know rightly why the landlord allows that notice to remain on the house, but there it is, and has been ever since I can mind." And as we could get no

further information on the matter, we once more proceeded with our journey.

In due course we reached Thrapstone, a pleasant enough little market town, but in no way remarkable, so we only stopped there long enough to replenish our tank with petrol. Truly, the long day was coming to its close, and the hotel at Thrapstone looked inviting, but, unhappily, Thrapstone itself was uninteresting, and as we judged by our map that Oundle was only some eight miles off, thither we elected to go. At Oundle we found ourselves in a delightful old town, clean, neat, and picturesque, its quiet streets being graced by many an ancient building, the chief of which, to our mind, was the quaint Talbot inn that bore on its swinging sign the date of 1626. It certainly looked ancient enough with its weather-beaten front, its grey stone mullioned windows, and ball-capped gables, and formed a prominently picturesque feature in the town street. Even the most casual of travellers could scarcely be so heedless as to pass it unregarded by.

At the arched doorway of the inn we pulled up to inspect the interior, with the view of staying at Oundle overnight; this we did as a matter of precaution, for an ancient building may be delightfully picturesque without, and delightful to look upon, but within it may be musty and uninviting. The Talbot proved to be a very desirable resting-place,—fortunate, too, in its landlord and landlady, both being most obliging and taking thoughtful care of our comfort; we were grateful to the Fates for

having brought us thither. Our bedroom was fresh, sweet, and clean, in spite of the age of the house, a good deal pleasanter to sleep in than many a one I have occupied at expensive modern hotels of wide reputation. There is an indefinable charm, a sense of restfulness, to say nothing of the glamour of past associations, about an ancient and well-ordered hostelry that strongly appeals to the wayfarer who loves comfort more than show, and cares nothing for glare and glitter. "To take mine ease at mine inn" was not written of the big modern hotel!

Having secured our room and stabled our car, we got a-chatting with the landlord, who kindly showed us over his ancient hostelry and related to us some of its history. We learnt that it was built of the hewn stone from Fotheringhay Castle, and that the mullioned windows came from there; also the exceptionally grand old carved oak staircase which he specially pointed out for our admiration—a staircase worth a day's journey to see! "Lots of people come to have a look at it," exclaimed the landlord, "and one day a wealthy American came and wanted to purchase it." I was glad to learn that the wealthy American's dollars did not prevail, and I trust that the staircase will remain where it is as long as the inn endures, for there it has found a suitable resting-place, at least as suitable a one as may now be found. When we trod upon those stairs we seemed to tread on history, for as it formerly belonged to Fotheringhay, it must have been often trod by Mary Queen of Scots when a prisoner there, it being then the great staircase of

the castle. Sentiment still counts for something in this world, and the sentimental traveller may indulge his fancies whilst within the ancient walls of the Talbot at sleepy, sunny Oundle.

Another thing about his historic hostelry the landlord called our attention to, a thing that we had not seen before during all our wanderings in the out-of-the-way corners of England, and did not even know to exist, was that certain of the windows were filled with horn in place of glass—and both transparent and white were many of the horn panes, so that one could see through them quite clearly; how old they were the landlord could not say. We had noticed these windows externally without observing anything uncommon about them, excepting that the panes were small, but not smaller than those of glass set in lead that one finds so frequently in ancient houses. A horn window has at least one virtue—it will not break.

CHAPTER XXI

The charm of pastoral scenery—Fotheringhay and its memories—
A monument of ancient piety—A beautiful gateway—Country
quietude—Over the Fens—Solitude and space—Wisbech—
The old-world town of Lynn—The scenery of East Anglia—
Moorland and forest—Thetford—Ipswich.

OUR landlord of the Talbot at Oundle had the virtue, rarely found in landlords, of knowing all the country round, and of being well acquainted with the places of interest within reasonable distance thereof, and was, moreover, able and willing to give all needful information about them ; he was a living guide-book. So we got to discussing about surrounding spots and scenery, and made the discovery that Oundle was the centre of a district abounding in places worth seeing, and worth coming from far to see.

Fotheringhay is not the least of these noteworthy places, and to Fotheringhay we made up our minds to start on the morrow. The drive thither was delightful, for the country we passed through on the way was as beautiful as many-tinted woods, the greenest of green meadows, and winding, gleaming river could make it ; there was nothing wonderful

about it but its quiet beauty ; it was in no possible sense show scenery ; but it is after all such gentle benevolent scenery with its subtle charms, its soothing simplicity, the recollection of which causes the feeling of home-sickness that ever and again comes over the Englishman, whether he will or no, in far-off foreign lands, and the essence of it is restfulness. All about is so peaceful, that word alone describes it ! It reproached me that I had lived so long in England, and had travelled so much therein, and yet till that day I had never found my way to the charming Nene valley ; no one I knew had ever been there, and never a hint had I heard of its loveliness. It is a country where Nature smiles upon you ; it is luxuriant and delicious !

On our way we passed an old, droning water-mill beside the quiet-flowing Nene ; it was sheltered by leafy trees, and surrounded by lush meadows, in which lazy cattle were standing motionless ; the old mill was a perfect picture, and might have been bodily transferred there from one of Constable's paintings ; it was as though for once Nature had copied the master, instead of the master having copied Nature ! A few miles more brought us to Fotheringhay, which is to-day, as probably it has always been, and as Leland has described it, "one street all of stone building." It seemed strangely quiet when we were there, for in the long street not a soul did we see, even the sounding of our horn brought no one forth, though we sounded it with the intent of so doing, for we wished to see the

interior of the church, and desired to know where we might obtain the keys of it. As no one appeared, we ventured to knock at the door of a house that looked more important than the rest, and so we presumed might be the rectory. It proved to be the rectory, but the maid who opened the door said they had not the key, but directed us to where the clerk lived who had it. It seems strange to me that in some country districts you will find almost every church door carefully locked, whilst in others they are nearly all left open. Of course you can generally obtain the church key from the clerk, if you are fortunate enough to find him, for oftentimes that important individual is not at home, and no one knows where he is. Then, if you have reason to believe that the church is interesting, and if you have come far to see it, you feel that possibly things might be better ordered.

Now that its erst stately castle has wholly disappeared, not one stone being left upon another above ground—for only its foundations hidden in the earth are to be traced on the grass-grown mound that once it crowned—its church is the glory of Fotheringhay. And a sufficient glory too; a monument in stone of ancient piety, a graphic reminder of the devotional days departed, that stands there as though musing over the eventful centuries that have passed. For such a building marks time by centuries!

A noble church for a village to possess, or for that matter a noble one for any town; originally it was much larger, for here man has been both

builder and destroyer, and, alas, it is so much easier to destroy than to create! Externally this fine church, remnant though it be of a still finer one, is picturesquely impressive with its beautiful tower surmounted by a lofty octagonal lantern, and its flying pinnacled buttresses that boldly span the wide roofs of the aisles in order to give support to the clerestory walls. My photograph will, I trust, convey some idea of the gracefulness of this delightful and dignified specimen of ancient ecclesiastical architecture. The vane on the top of the tower takes the form of a spread eagle; possibly for some historic reason it may have been the crest of the founder of the church; however, this is mere conjecture, for I have neither the time nor the inclination to hunt up authorities as to its purport—if purport it has.

Within, the church distinctly disappointed us, for in such a historic spot we expected much. The interior had a look that was cold and bare: the air there felt damp and chilly, unholily so, though the day was hot almost to sultriness. The great oak door, bleached with age, we entered by creaked loudly on its hinges, even our footsteps on the pavement, lightly as we trod, caused a hollow and a melancholy sound, the walls of the ancient fane seemed to enclose a stillness that was unnatural—uncanny. A century-gathered gloom also brooded around, an intangible something that we felt, yet could not reason about. Was there any ghostly, unseen, haunting presence there, we wondered, or why this sense of mysterious depression? We



FOTHERINGHAY CHURCH.

longed to get out into the bright, cheerful, wholesome sunlight again, and almost concluded to take one hurried glance at the interior and depart. But our interest overcame our momentary desire to go away.

The open-timber roof of the north aisle appeared to be sadly requiring repair; indeed, when we were there it was kept from falling down by upright posts of wood rising from the floor; these posts told a pitiful tale of the want of pence for needful restoration. The best-preserved thing in the church, to the eye at least (for beyond where the eye can see it probably may be worm-eaten), is the fine old carved oak pulpit with the plain traces of colouring still upon it; in the centre of the panel at the back is a well-carved royal coat-of-arms, with an open crown on the top; the shield below being quartered (I believe that is the correct heraldic expression) with lions and fleurs-de-lis, which show its ancientness and approximate date. Above the pulpit is a fine Jacobean sounding-board, an article that is becoming rare in churches.

But the chief interest of Fotheringhay church consists of the two large monuments erected therein by the order of Queen Elizabeth, one on either side of the chancel, which, we are informed by an inscription above, "Were made in the year of our Lord 1573." The one on the south side is to the memory of

Edward Duke of York slain in the Battle

Of Agincourt, in the 3rd. Year of Henry 5th. 1415.

The one on the north side is to the memory of

Richard Plantagenet Duke of York. Nephew
To Edward Duke of York and Father to King
Edward 4th. slain at Wakefield in the 37th
Year of Henry 6th. 1459. and lies buried here
With Cecily his Wife.

Cecily, Dutchess of York Daughter to Ralph
Neville first Earl of Westmorland.

These monuments are interesting because of their history, and not for any artistic merit they possess : the design of both is simple and similar, but it is simplicity without much grace of form, and the carving on them is feeble and feelingless, which seems strange considering by whom they were ordered and the general richness and elaborate sculpturing of the monuments to important personages of that period. A tablet on the wall of the south aisle bears the following inscription, presumably copied, it is to be hoped correctly, from the original one that was placed there when the church was first built :—

In Festi Martyrii Processu Martiniani
Ecclesiæ prima fuit hujus Petra locata
Anno Christi primo centum quatuor ac mille
Cum deca quinta. Henrici quinti
Tunc imminente secundo.

1415.

And that was the last item of interest we discovered in the church.

Wandering down the village we noticed the fine carved stone archway, of goodly proportions, that

belonged to the hostel built to receive the many guests who from time to time visited the castle; this picturesque gateway, with the two-lighted mullioned window of the porter's room above, now forms part of a pleasant modern dwelling, and this incorporation has happily been done with as little hurt as may be to the old work and possibly to its better preservation.

A little farther along, where the village ends, is the great mound, rounded and bare except for its covering of grass, whereon the stately castle stood, a castle so intimately connected with the pathetic tragedy of Mary Queen of Scots, for therein she met her doom—one of the saddest episodes of English history. *Sic transit gloria mundi* may well be written of this deserted spot. From the top of the mound one looks down upon nothing but peaceful meadows, and round its base glides by, without even a murmur, the placid river Nene; there could not be a scene of greater tranquillity.

We crossed the river by an old stone bridge, which has replaced a still older one built by Queen Elizabeth. Stukeley, the antiquary, makes mention of this earlier structure, and he states that it bore the inscription:—

God save ye Queene
This Bridge was built by
Queene Elizabeth
In the 15th. yere of her Reygne
A . D. 1573.

Cromwell's Republican soldiers are credited with having hacked this inscription away with their

swords: the reputed misdoings of Cromwell's troopers have long ago got beyond my count, so have their inexhaustible cannon-balls that seem to have been hurled against almost every castle and upon innumerable churches in the kingdom. The average clerk, I notice, when unable to account for any ancient damage done to his church, unfailingly puts it down to Cromwell. On no journey that I have taken in England yet have I been able to escape from Cromwell's cannon-balls!

Beyond Fotheringhay we came into a dreamy, old-world country, and a very pleasant country it was of ancient homes, rambling farmsteads, and time-toned villages that gave us, one and all, a friendly greeting; a land of verdant meadows and spreading oaks with no suggestion of ugly modernism about it, a corner of old England still retaining what is becoming so rare a thing, the unspoilt picturesqueness of past days. It was delightful to drive through that somnolent, mellow country-side with the hush of centuries upon it, and with nothing but the beautiful to meet the vision, a beauty of the quiet kind that does not proclaim itself by any prominent feature, and that, like a bashful maiden, seems to shun rather than to court observation.

As we drove slowly on, Washington Irving's description of the charms of English scenery came to mind, for it exactly portrays what was presented to us that day, and this is what Irving says in his *Sketch Book*:—"It does not abound in grand and sublime prospects, but rather in little home

scenes of rural repose and sheltered quiet. Every antique farm-house and moss-grown cottage is a picture; and as the roads are continually winding, and the view is shut in by groves and hedges, the eye is delighted by a continual succession of small landscapes of captivating loveliness." Those two last words express it in a nutshell, and it is also lovable; mere sublimity is apt to pall after a time; you cannot be always on a tension of admiration, but quiet pastoral scenery woos and wins your affection, and keeps it.

In truth we felt that we had come into a veritable Arcadia, though our sentimental views received somewhat of a shock upon praising the country to a native, for he bluntly replied, "Aye, but you don't live in it," and then went his way without more ado. However, there are some people who would complain in Paradise of the fit of their halo, and possibly that native was one of those curiously constituted individuals who love to differ just for the pleasure of differing. Sometimes it is well to enjoy a landscape without too long or too close a scrutiny of it, and not to expect rapture or poetry of a native, though you may occasionally unexpectedly find it there.

It was with regret that we parted company with the pleasant river Nene at Peterborough, from whence it finds its way through the flat Fens to the rough North Sea, although we obtained one more peep of it as it runs through the town of Wisbech, but so altered! for there it was muddy, commercial, and had lost all its rural pleasantness. Beyond Peterborough we too found ourselves in the Fens, a

broad expanse of damp, level land, as level almost as the summer sea, and with its circling blue horizon that seemed to melt into the sky, apparently to the eye as boundless. A land where sluggish dykes take the place of the familiar hedges as fences, so that there is nothing to obstruct the range of vision, a fact that gives the traveller a rare sense of freedom and spaciousness—and above all the wide overarching sky, like one mighty dome, extends from far-off horizon to far-off horizon. And this wide sky floods the open fens with unshadowed light, so that one forgives the monotony of the landscape for the inspiriting brightness of it, at least when the sun is shining. But the glory of the Fens is their wonderful sunsets,—a revelation of colour when the sun is seen through the vapour-laden atmosphere, sinking low down amidst burning crimsons and melting gold. The Fens have a beauty of their own, though the average man wots not of it, for time is needed to appreciate their special charms. I know an artist who deems the mountain scenery of Scotland and Wales dreary and depressing, that of Switzerland theatrical, and who yearly goes to Holland in search of the picturesque: more jokingly than seriously, one day, I recommended him to try the Fens of Lincolnshire by way of change, which to my surprise he did, and afterwards he exclaimed to me, “I had no idea that there was such beautiful scenery in England!”

I find by my map that after Peterborough we passed first through Eye, but I have no remembrance of that village of so curious a name—a name

that possibly is a contraction of "eyot," a little island, for if slightly raised above the level of the Fens (before they were drained and so generally flooded, and always in the winter time) it would have been one. But Thorney beyond, I remember as a large and rather picturesque place, with a very tall windmill, whose big sails, bickering in the breeze, gave a welcome touch of life and movement to the still landscape. Thorney of old was famous for its stately abbey. "As fair an abbey as may be," but it has vanished utterly, as in the Fens, where stone is difficult to obtain, it formed an acceptable ready-made quarry, and those who would helped themselves freely of its store. Some of the abbey has gone to mere dust, for many of its stones were broken up and during long years used for road repairing!

So we drove on through a sea of level greenery that changed not its restful monotony for mile upon mile, joying in the sunshine and in the rush of the fragrant wind.

Then presently the long, level horizon of blue ahead was broken by the dim outline of buildings, over which hovered a faint haze of smoke. To this spot, with many windings, our road eventually led, and on reaching it we found ourselves in the town of Wisbech, through which we drove over cobbled streets and alongside a slothful river, the Nene, that had outgrown its youthful charms. Wisbech struck us as a place that once had been quaint, judging by the glimpses of bits of old buildings we caught as we passed along, relics of an earlier day ;

but Wisbech has lost nearly all its quaintness, and is now more commercial than picturesque, yet not assertively so; still there is little therein to detain the traveller purely on pleasure bent. So we passed through it with merely a halt to ask our way on to Lynn.

We were soon again in the open Fens, basking in the warm sunshine, tempered by a refreshing breeze—a breeze that had an unmistakable salt flavour about it, a pleasant reminder that we were nearing the sea. Then, as the miles passed by, we espied in front of us, rising tall above the green level landscape, the masts of shipping, and soon afterwards the town of Lynn loomed into view, showing dreamily indistinct through the quivering air. Seen thus, from far off, it had a romantic look, for there is always a sense of poetry about the indefinite. Turner, above every other artist, grasped this charm of mystery. The eye rejoices at times to escape from mere hard facts and, when opportunity occurs, to indulge in a little quiet romancing.

Lynn gave us an old-world greeting as we approached it by its ancient and almost perfect south gate-tower, that has turrets at its angles and a guard's room over its central archway, and a creek running from the river by its side that in past days did the duty of a moat. Beyond the gate-tower we had presented to us the irregular-roofed town—a confusion of Dutchlike houses, with churches and public buildings, old and picturesque of outline—rising here and there above them. The whole town had a look of age, and though purely

accidental, its buildings, dimmed and worn by the salt winds, made an effective group—such a one as the old masters loved to put on canvas.

Lynn has the charm of ancientness ; it is utterly unlike any other English town that I know, and so it further pleases because it possesses the quality, so scarce nowadays, of a pronounced originality. With little call upon the imagination, but for the modern motor car, we could easily have indulged in the illusion of being medieval travellers entering a medieval town. The streets of Lynn are mostly narrow, as becomes a place of such antiquity, and as we drove along them we noticed many architectural tit-bits. Amongst these, what perhaps most impressed us was the isolated and tall two-storied lantern tower of the ruined Grey Friars' Convent church, which in a curious manner stands on the top of a bare open arch that, with the tower it upholds, is all that remains of the once stately edifice. Next we came to the quaint Guild Hall, built, we were told, early in the sixteenth century. The front of this has a peculiar look, being of squares of dark flint and white stone, arranged chess-board fashion, the effect of which is perhaps more striking than satisfactory. On the other hand, the Custom-house is altogether delightful, being both quaint and beautiful, with its high-pitched roof crowned with a tall cupola, relying wholly and successfully on pleasing proportion for its effect. Then there is the very interesting Red Mount (of old the Rood Mount) Chapel, elaborately decorated, a unique production of medieval times, in which

were preserved certain relics for the edification of pilgrims and to the profit of the priests. Nor did we fail to note, as we passed it by, the Grammar School, erected on the site of an older one, in which Eugene Aram was an assistant master, and from whence he was taken to meet his doom for a murder committed many years before.

Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist,
And Eugene Aram walked between
With gyves upon his wrist.

Searching for an inn, we came to a large, deserted, and sunny market-place which was surrounded by roomy old houses and sleepy shops, and there, but for the names around, we might have imagined ourselves in some old forsaken town of Flanders, so foreign a look had it. At the rear of our inn we discovered a little garden stretching down to the water's edge, from whence we had a delightful view of the river and shipping thereon, and of the primitive ferry that was continually being slowly rowed backwards and forwards across the stream, for Lynn is a commercial town where no one seems, or needs, to hurry, and the service of steam is unthought of. It is the only town I know that is both commercial and wholly picturesque. We saw many old-fashioned craft on the river, such as one finds in old pictures, and never expects to find out of them; and a three-masted sailing ship that might have almost been of the Jacobean days, so quaint of build was she, was gliding quietly

out to sea. We felt that we must be surely dreaming. To have the vision of that ancient ship was worth the whole long drive—it was both a picture and a poem. We looked right down the river to the distant sea and its mystery, or rather what we felt and knew to be the sea, for the horizon was lost in brightness, as though it were vacant space, and that there must be the end of the world. In that old-time port, with its old-fashioned shipping, we felt the glamour of the blue water as we had never felt it before, and many a half-forgotten sea song and legend came to mind, till we began to envy the sailor's free, adventurous life in spite of our recollection of the old proverb, "Praise the sea, but keep on land."

One can hardly write of Lynn, however briefly, without making mention of its churches, the most notable of which is St. Margaret's, a cathedral in miniature. Here may be found two of the largest and finest of the many fine brasses in England, besides which both are uncommon and of peculiar interest. One of these, of 1564, is to Robert Braunche, a Mayor of Lynn, and represents at its foot a feast that that Mayor gave to Edward III., attended by knights and minstrels, and amongst the luxuries on the table is shown a dressed peacock! The other brass, much worn, is to one Adam de Walsoken, bears the date of 1349, and at the foot of this is represented a country scene, and neither a feast nor a landscape do I ever remember to have seen portrayed on a memorial brass before, where such things seem out of place. In the country scene

is introduced a post windmill of primitive form, having a long horizontal beam below to act as a lever to turn the mill round towards the wind. Even to-day one comes occasionally upon a windmill of this primitive type, and it is interesting to note how long the type has existed with scarcely any change. During the siege of Lynn one of Cromwell's countless cannon-balls, already mentioned, crashed into St. Margaret's Church, knocking down a pillar, but doing no further hurt. This was the fifth time we had come upon these famous cannon-balls during the journey, which is somewhat under our average number in relation to the mileage done.

Besides the more prominent buildings of Lynn, there may be found by the river-side there many a curious old house, and many a weather-beaten sailor, and sundry odds and ends of characters that gather about where any shipping may be, as certainly as flies gather round honey. Lynn is full of pictures, and an artist might do worse than hie thither with his colours and his canvases, and by its water-side he need never be at a loss for good figure-subjects.

The charm of Lynn may not be for every one, for the charm of a place depends upon the sentiment of a traveller and how he beholds it. To the dullard all places alike are dull, and to him even Venice is but a collection of houses on the sea, though he may not publicly own it. But as the ancient town impressed us, so I write of it; and glad I am to have seen it. We looked for romance there and found it.

I am ashamed to confess, but as I am writing a strictly veracious account of our tour I feel bound to confess it, that we drove that glorious afternoon all the way from Lynn to Ipswich, a distance of 63 honest miles, with but one stop at the little town of Thetford, and that only to inquire our road forward. But having made this confession, let me say that we set out with no such intention, and that though we did not pull up here and there on the way, as was our wont, neither did we rush wildly along at post-haste, seeing nothing—or is it motor-haste nowadays? We simply drove leisurely on, for we were in a lazy mood, too lazy a one even to trouble to stop, and the country was of a delightfully restful kind that induced a sort of daydreaming progress. It was a land of pleasant farms dotted with old, rambling farmsteads—a land of meadows, and that day of waving fields of ripening corn that shimmered golden in the sunshine, so that the prospect did not want for colour—a land of sleepy hollows, of little villages, and tiny forgotten hamlets, unspoilt in their ancient picturesqueness—a land to dally in, though by some strange perversity we did not dally in it.

Over all the country brooded an air of unsophistication—a sense of remoteness and of repose. The scenery of East Anglia has a charm of homeliness. The country generally has the reputation of being flat and uninteresting; truly it is unambitious, but it has its

. . . own befitting charms
Of quiet heath and fertile farms.

It can boast of no high hills, but it is undulating rather than flat, at least what we have seen of it, and we have, somewhat to our surprise, encountered stiff gradients on some of its roads that might be considered steep even in hilly Devonshire.

East Anglia has no large manufacturing cities nor the smoke of them to pollute her pure, clear air, and though it is mostly given over to farming, much to the beauty of the land, still it is not wholly tame or cultivated, for shortly before reaching Thetford we came to a wild, open moorland country, as wild as anything we had seen in Exmoor. For miles there was not a house or a building of any kind in sight, not even a distant film of uprising smoke to tell of human habitation — only the rough, fenceless moorland around “a solitude of unshorn grass” and broken bracken, bounded on one hand by a deep, dark forest of wind-blown Scotch firs that, with their gaunt red trunks and fantastically twisted and intertwined branches, might well have served for some enchanted forest of the fairy tales so familiar to our boyish days. It looked strangely dark on that bright summer day as though nothing could lighten its venerable gloom. “A forest, ancient as the hills,” it seemed, and full of mysterious shadows in its pillared recesses. There is many a house with a well-established ghostly reputation that looks not half as haunted as did that “solemn forest, wreathed and old.” The only living things we saw on the lonely moorland were countless rabbits scampering about, and bounding over the roadway, oftentimes right in front of the

car, taking risks that one imagined no sane rabbit would ; but I am thankful to say we had no blood upon our consciences that night.

Then we gradually dropped down to Thetford, a historic old town and quaint, though not strikingly so. Beyond Thetford the country gradually tamed down and became again pastoral and cultivated, though it was not without its stretches of wild bits here and there ; but whether tilled or wild, it was full of sweetness. Of the villages we passed through that day I have now only a vague recollection of Stoke Ferry as looking grey and old, and of Ixworth, where we noticed one or two picturesque cottages with ornamented fronts of plaster, and with horn windows, the latter showing how old they were. We also passed through the small town of Stowmarket, and the large village of Needham Market, in one of which—I cannot now trust my memory as to which—our eyes were delighted by a glimpse of an inviting-looking inn of the coaching era. I have since regretted that we did not stop awhile there to sample its fare and accommodation.

And so we reached Ipswich with an hour till sunset before us, to say nothing of the gloaming that follows when the light still lingers. At Ipswich we had thought to spend the night at the White Horse Inn, where, it may be remembered, Mr. Pickwick met “with a romantic adventure with a middle-aged lady in yellow curl-papers,” but a glance at our map showed that Felixstowe was but a dozen miles away, and the call of the sea and the

freshness of it we could not resist, the more especially as Ipswich struck us as being somewhat hot and stuffy ; its streets—perhaps the more so by contrast with the tranquil country we had just left behind—seemed very noisy with traffic and thronged with people. It was no place for quiet-loving wanderers such as we, so without more ado we set forth for Felixstowe. Between Ipswich and Felixstowe the country has little to boast of in a scenic sense ; it is not exactly ugly, but it is, on the whole, unanimated and uninteresting with a single line of railway for company most of the distance.

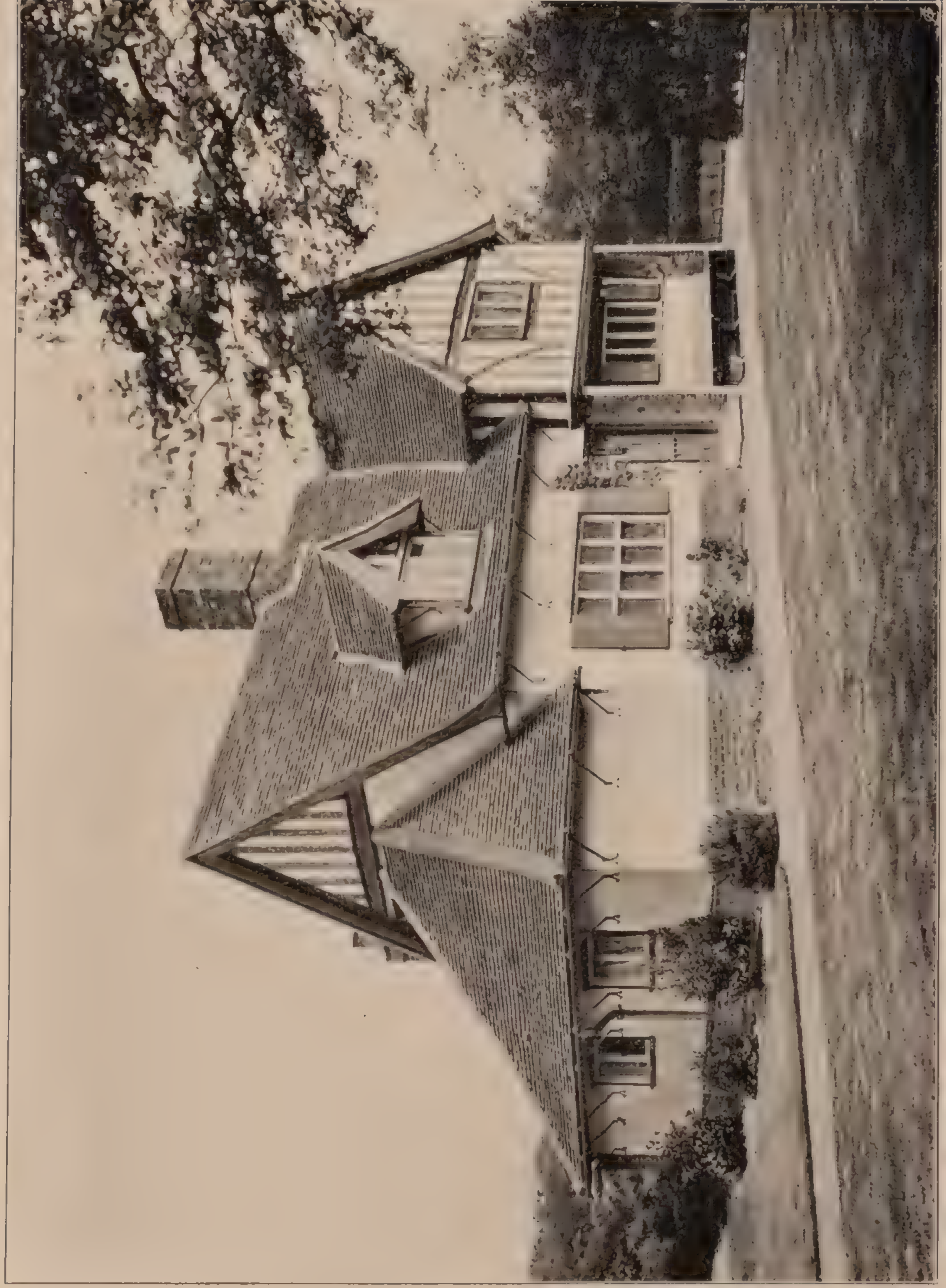
CHAPTER XXII

Hotel *versus* inn—Constable's cottage—A monkish tradition—Bell cage in East Bergholt churchyard—Constable's country—A quaint custom—Dunmow and its flitch of bacon—Sleepy old towns—A ford—Curious tombstones—The end of the journey.

AT Felixstowe we found quarters for the night at the Felix Hotel. Now the Felix Hotel is an imposing and even a palatial building, yet not unpicturesque withal; it reminded us of stately Hatfield House, being of the same glorified Elizabethan style, with a bold clock-and-bell turret above to complete the resemblance. But such palatial quarters did not appeal to two such travel-stained modest travellers as ourselves. We should have preferred a simple country inn and the homeliness of it, with a motherly landlady to look after our comforts, a genial landlord to entertain us with gossip, and a "wrinkled ostler" to tell us of the country round. But travellers cannot always be choosers, and though I love not the huge caravanserais, still the Felix Hotel proved to be comfortable as well as luxurious, and we had no noisy band to annoy us during the evening, for which great mercy we felt exceedingly thankful. Moreover, we discovered our hotel had a pleasant

garden leading down to the sea—a garden with terraces, summer-houses, and shady nooks and corners, and even a pillared sun-dial, placed there, we presumed, for the sake of the picturesque.

The next morning we started forth to explore the place, taking our camera with us, though more as a matter of custom than for any expectancy of using it. During our wanderings we discovered a rather picturesque cottage in a large garden, with a notice-board in front informing us it was to let. We were tempted to take a photograph of this, and whilst we were so doing a man came up to us and proclaimed himself as the caretaker, and asked if we would like to see over the place. Then he went on: "It's a pretty little house; it's called Constable's Cottage, for the painter of that name, of whom you may have heard, lived in it for some time, and painted a lot of pictures in that room," pointing at the same time indefinitely upwards to the sky; but we imagined he meant to indicate the window in the large gable, and it happened we imagined rightly. "It has been restored, and is as good as new," he added, "but it's very old-fashioned inside." Truly, one need not look twice to discover that externally it had been thoroughly restored, even to the extent of looking painfully modern, but not unpicturesquely so. Within we found it much as the man said, "very old-fashioned," with low oak-beamed ceilinged rooms, doors that opened with a latch, hearth fireplaces, and a general look of ancientness, in strange contrast with its much-restored exterior. The best room was up-



CONSTABLE'S COTTAGE, AS RESTORED, FELIXSTOWE.

stairs, the one that Constable used as a studio, we were informed, quite a humble apartment and in no way impressive; but "It is not places that grace men, but men places."

Leaving Felixstowe, we returned to Ipswich by the way we came, for the simple reason that there was no other road out of the town to take, for there was the river Deben to the north and the river Orwell to the south, and no bridge over either.

Beyond Ipswich we struck upon the old London turnpike road, a pleasant enough road for a highway, though not particularly inspiring. As we were driving leisurely along, thinking of nothing in particular, we espied a signpost with an arm pointing down a leafy and inviting lane, and on the arm was inscribed, "To East Bergholt." Then we remembered that we were in Constable's country, and that at East Bergholt he was born, and in the neighbourhood he painted many of his most famous pictures. So down that lane we turned in search of the village, right glad to escape from the dusty highway, to say nothing of the greater attraction of visiting the homeland of the master.

Arriving at a few scattered houses, we asked if we were in East Bergholt, and discovered that we were. Then, as we could see no church, we asked our way to it, and were informed that it was half a mile farther along. "You'll find it opposite the Nunnery." Now it seemed strange to us to be so directed, for if we did not know the location of the church, how should we know that of the Nunnery? By the way, could our stern Puritan ancestors come

back to life again, how scandalised and astonished they would be to find both monasteries and convents flourishing in Protestant England! Yet during our journey we came upon both monasteries and convents, and even saw some real modern monks!

East Bergholt proved to be, as we expected to find it, a very pretty village, though we greatly regretted to learn that the house in which Constable was born had been pulled down. Now the chief interest of the village is in its grand old church, the tower of which appears never to have been finished, for only the lowest story of this exists, a glorious fragment of carved stone and carefully squared flint. There is a local tradition that as fast as the monkish builders raised the tower in the day-time, the devil pulled it down during the night; but I think I have heard that tradition before of other places. Within, the church, though well cared for, is not of special interest, except, perhaps, to the learned antiquary, who discovers charms which are not revealed to the ordinary man. However, we observed a mural monument in the nave, the inscription on which we deemed worth copying, and here it is:—

Edwarde Lambe

Second sonne of Thomas Lambe of Trimley Esquire.

All his days he lived a Batcheler well learned

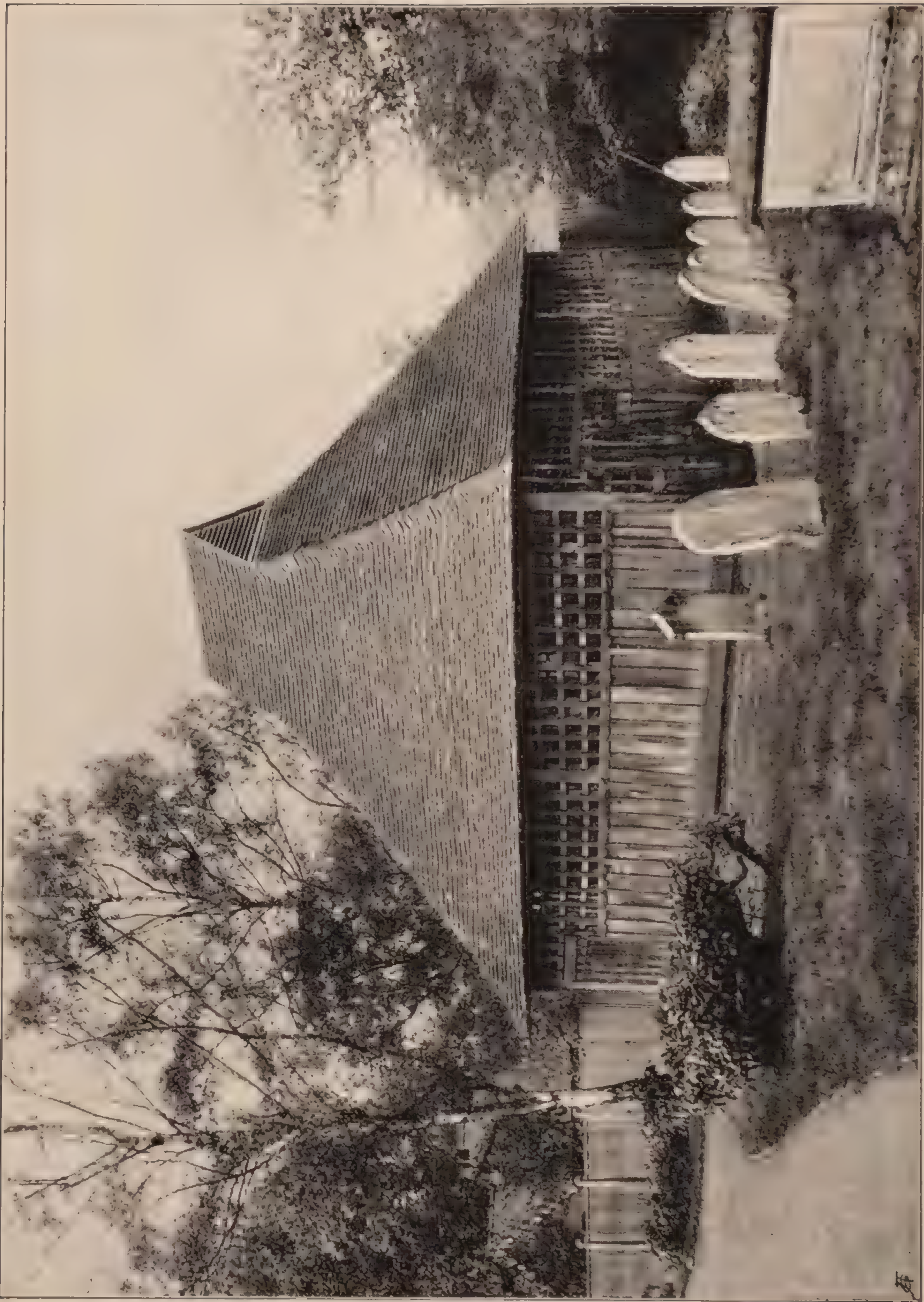
In Devyne and Common Lawes. With his Councell

He helped many yett tooke fees scarce of Any.

He Dyed the XIXth of November 1617.

Lambe is surely rather a quaint name for a lawyer, yet it appears to have been deserved in this case.

BELL CAGE, EAST BERGHOLT CHURCHYARD.



It is a little singular that though the date of his death is given his age is not.

In a corner of the churchyard we discovered a curious structure of oak, with a high-pitched roof of tiles, and we asked a man who was mowing the grass what it was. "That be the bell cage," said he, "as we ain't got no tower for the bells, but they do very well there." We had never seen anything of the kind before, and upon going up to it for a closer inspection, through the oak lattice sides we saw within five big bells hung on strong beams, and supplied with wheels and ropes ready for ringing. On one bell we noted the date 1688, as well as an inscription running round it, of which, however, we could only trace the few words nearest to us, and between the words were a series of large silver coins let into the metal, possibly those current at the time the bell was cast, but in the dim light it was difficult to make out minor details. My photograph will serve to show what a quaint structure this old bell cage is.

East Bergholt is an attractive spot, and the scenery of the immediate country, especially down by the leafy, lazy river, brings at once Constable's works to mind, just as the landscapes about, and the moorlands above, Bettws-y-Coed are suggestive of the drawings of David Cox. Both artists have happily caught the spirit of the scenes they painted, a something more than mere fact; it needs not the master's hand to record the latter. "Paint what you love, and love what you paint," might have been the motto of both these famous English artists.

Frame almost any bit of country around East Bergholt with your hands, and you behold a living Constable. It is a spot to linger in, and to linger in it is, with Constable, to love it, for the scenery about is so sweet, so soothing, and so winning. It might, had the Fates been generously disposed, have given the world a great poet to sing of its charms, as it gave a great artist to paint them; but perhaps this would be expecting too much of Fate, who seldom comes "with both hands full."

Soon after leaving this beauty spot we found ourselves in the ancient town of Colchester, a town that has much to show the traveller of antiquarian or archæological tastes; yet though we confess to both of these in a mild and limited way, Colchester did not detain us that day, our excuses being that we had already leisurely explored it, and that just then the green country-side appealed to us more strongly than any town, great though its interests be.

The curious old custom of Proclaiming the Winter still prevails at Colchester, and long may it prevail! Too many of these quaint, time-honoured doings have been allowed to fall into disuse, and so are gone for ever, to our loss. It is generally, with a little thought and trouble, a simple and an easy matter to retain an old-established custom, but almost impossible to revive it successfully once the thread of the tradition be broken. And this is how winter is proclaimed at Colchester. On the 1st of December in each year the town crier goes round the streets, commencing his walk at midnight, chanting as he goes:—

Cold December has come in,
Poor people's backs are clothed thin ;
The trees are bare, the birds are mute :
A pot and toast would very well suit.

Colchester left behind, we found ourselves on a fine wide, but dusty and uninteresting main road, erst the mail-coach highway to London. We took an early opportunity of parting company with this, selecting a quiet lane more to our liking, which led us into a pleasant land of green fields and leafy woods, and on to the long one-streeted and not unpicturesque town of Coggeshall. We thought it was a village, but an inhabitant, of whom we asked its name, declared it was a town, and as he lived there he ought to know. Coggeshall is not without interest to the traveller, for close by are the slight ruins of an old abbey, pleasantly situated, and though erected in the medieval days by monkish builders, the abbey, judging from what remains of it, appears to have been wholly constructed of brick, which, as far as my knowledge extends, is a most unusual thing. I should not, however, without consulting authorities upon the subject, dare to declare it unique, but I have never come upon another English abbey so built. Not far from these ruins stands a solitary and ancient chapel that formerly was utilised as a barn, but which has been restored to a place of worship again, and the river is crossed by an ancient bridge of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. So Coggeshall has something to show the traveller, and any motorist who by chance passes that way would do well to call a short halt there.

A few more miles brought us to the little town of Braintree, and the best thing in the place to our mind was the unpretending old coaching inn; it may have been hunger that made us think this, for we had forgotten to provision our luncheon basket that morning, and at the ancient hostelry we fared sumptuously, and left it with our blessing, for our bill was light.

After Braintree succeeded a long stretch of open country, and our undulating road now and then afforded us many charming views and peeps of sunlit distances, and some of the old farm-houses and cottages on the way were sufficiently picturesque to cause us to remember them. Dunmow was the next place we came to, a quiet little market-town that has acquired a certain amount of fame on account of the old custom of presenting a flitch of bacon there to any couple who could swear on a prescribed oath that, "sleeping or waking, they had not repented of their marriage for a year and a day." Though I believe the custom originated with the Priory of Little Dunmow, an adjacent village, which Priory held certain lands on condition of such service. Whether the flitch of bacon is still presented or not we could not discover, for some of the local people said they believed it was, though they did not seem very certain about the matter; others said that the custom had been revived, but some years there were no claimants. So difficult is it to obtain precise information on the spot!

This part of Essex abounds in unsophisticated little towns, and though none of them are of much

consequence, yet they all have the virtue of being neat and clean, and even mildly picturesque by reason of a few old and quaint houses in their somnolent streets, for they are happily not progressive enough to have these improved (?) away; and if this be from want of money, then, say I, blessed be their poverty! After Braintree, Bishop Stortford was the next town on our road, but of towns we had had enough that day, so we passed through it without making a stop. Presently we dipped down to an old bridge, at which point we pulled up to consult a signpost in order to learn where we were going, for we still pursued our haphazard, yet interesting, mode of travel. We discovered that we were on the road to Hertford. Then we noticed a wide gate by the hedge, and a post opposite to it on the other side of the way, by which we concluded that the gate was closed across the road at times. A man was standing idling on the bridge, and we asked him why the gate was there. "That be to close the road when the water's out," said he; "you see there be a ford a little farther on, and after heavy rain it be too deep to be forded, then the gate is closed to prevent people using the road and perhaps getting drowned, and the water is often out in the winter." "Is there any way round?" we queried. "No, there bain't," was the reply, "unless one goes a good many miles round; it be a bad road to travel over in the winter, that it be." Fortunately for us the weather had been fine of late, so that the ford offered no obstacle to our progress; indeed, just

then it appeared quite an innocent affair. All the same it must be annoying and, to put it mildly, exceedingly inconvenient to live in a country where a main road has to be closed at the whim of the weather.

We duly reached Hertford, where we found comfortable quarters for the night. Whilst chatting with the landlord of our inn he suddenly exclaimed, "If you've not been to Hertford before you really ought to go and see our beautiful church and churchyard, they are close by." Now, though exactly why I cannot say, it struck us as somewhat strange for an innkeeper to recommend his guests to go and see a church by way of passing the time, to say nothing of a churchyard! However, we thanked him for the suggestion, and, having nothing else to do, made our way thither. We had not been wrongly advised, it proved, for we found a large and a very beautiful church in spite of its being quite modern, and an extensive, well-cared-for churchyard with its sad colony of graves. Not exactly a spot to make death seem desirable, though without its pathetic associations it would have been charming enough, for it was pleasantly shaded by old trees, and afforded an agreeable view of the town below and the country around. The church itself is a noble structure, conceived in a genuinely medieval spirit, and well and truly built, but in spite of its general excellence it was not wholly satisfying; yet the fault does not lie with the architect, for however great the modern architect may be, he is merely the master of the mass, as, for

the want of the artistic craftsman of old to do his bidding, he is not master of detail, and it was the detail of the carving and other accessory work that sadly disappointed us; this was too precise, too mechanically perfect, there was no feeling about it, the human touch was wanting, without which all decorative carving is of little worth; better, far better an honest, plain stone wall left to Nature to embellish than sculpture that does not adorn, for simple, honest construction seldom fails to please; it is the striving after artistic decoration without the art-craftsmen to realise it and the failure that vex the cultured eye.

Strolling round the churchyard in search of any curious epitaph, of which we found none, we noticed two quaint tombstones in the shape of two round millstones set up on end and half buried in the ground. One side of each of these had been smoothed down to receive an inscription, and one stone was inscribed to the memory of "Robert Fincher, Millwright, who died in 1777, aged 85," and the other to his wife—quaint, but withal very suitable memorials to a miller and his spouse. There was no other tombstone of interest, as far as we could discover, unless it were one notable for its beautiful and clear lettering, and on this we read the following:—

Here Lyeth
Black Tom of the
Bull Inn in Bishopsgate
Streett
1696.

Who "Black Tom" was, and why he was buried here so far away from his inn, I could glean no particulars, though, possibly, he was a well-known character in his day.

Our journey was now nearing its end, and that evening we carefully consulted our maps to find out how we could best reach our home in "Sussex by the sea" without the unprofitable and tedious drive through the wilderness of bricks and mortar of our modern Babylon. Finally, we decided to drive first to St. Albans by way of Hatfield, then to strike the Colne valley and follow it down, more or less as the road permitted, to Staines, thence to make for Dorking, and so through the pleasant land of Mid-Sussex to our starting-point.

The next morning broke mistily, and the mist, in time, turned to rain, but we made the best of the weather as we could not change it; rain or fine we determined to enjoy ourselves to the very end of our tour, and when you determine to do a thing you can generally manage to do it! Moreover, it was mutually agreed that the rain would allay the dust, so we made a virtue of it! The only drawback to our joy was the knowledge that it was the last day of our holiday, but we bore in mind that good things cannot last for ever; even could a holiday so last, the delight of it would be lost in monotony.

To St. Albans was a pleasant drive, and we had a peep of historic and lordly Hatfield House on the way; beyond St. Albans for a space the scenery was agreeable enough, and that is all I can find to say of it. Passing through Watford and

Rickmansworth, two undelightful towns, the little river Colne kept us company, most of the distance, to Denham, where we crossed the wide main London to Oxford road and, taking to the lanes, presently lost ourselves in a pleasant land of fir and pine and bracken-bordered woods, and glad we were to lose ourselves in such a delightful district; however, eventually, after consulting several signposts, we arrived safely at Staines. From Staines we made our way south by Chertsey to Cobham, the latter portion of our road being through more fragrant pines; thence we drove down the charming Vale of Mickleham to Dorking, and from Dorking, through a country of commons and woods, we made our way to Horsham, after which we struck upon a 'delectable region of green meadows and shady woods which brought us to West Grinstead, where we observed a large modern monastery set on a hill, though we saw no monks about; perhaps they were at their devotions. Then running inland to the north of the Downs, we followed along a lovely and, in parts, a lonely road to Lewes, and so home to Eastbourne, where we arrived with the evening star—and our journey was but a memory, yet how delightful was that memory!

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